UBI MEL, IBI APES
Frances Kent.

12312 8/25

# Hours in a Library

By

Leslie Stephen

---

*New Edition, with Additions*

---

In Four Volumes

Volume I.

G. P. Putnam's Sons
New York and London
The Knickerbocker Press
1904

# Contents


| | PAGE |
|---|---|
| De Foe's Novels | 1 |
| Richardson's Novels | 64 |
| Pope as a Moralist | 128 |
| Sir Walter Scott | 186 |
| Nathaniel Hawthorne | 230 |
| Balzac's Novels | 271 |
| De Quincey | 322 |

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

https://archive.org/details/bwb_T4-APS-761_1

# OPINIONS OF AUTHORS

Libraries are as the shrines where all the relics of the ancient saints, full of true virtue, and that without delusion or imposture, are preserved and reposed.—BACON, *Advancement of Learning.*

We visit at the shrine, drink in some measure of the inspiration, and cannot easily breathe in the other air less pure, accustomed to immortal fruits.—HAZLITT, *Plain Speaker.*

What a place to be in is an old library! It seems as though all the souls of all the writers that have bequeathed their labours to the Bodleian were reposing here as in some dormitory or middle state. I seem to inhale learning, walking amid their foliage; and the odour of their old moth-scented coverings is fragrant as the first bloom of the sciential apples which grew around the happy orchard.—CHARLES LAMB, *Oxford in the Long Vacation.*

My neighbours think me often alone, and yet at such times I am in company with more than five hundred mutes, each of whom communicates his ideas to me by dumb signs quite as intelligibly as any person living can do by uttering of words; and with a motion of my hand I can bring them as near to me as I please; I handle them as I like; they never complain of ill-usage; and when dismissed from my presence, though ever so abruptly, take no offence.—STERNE, *Letters.*

In a library we are surrounded by many hundreds of dear friends imprisoned by an enchanter in paper and leathern boxes.—EMERSON, *Books, Society, and Solitude.*

Nothing is pleasanter than exploring in a library.—LANDOR, *Pericles and Aspasia.*

I never come into a library (saith Heinsius) but I bolt the door to me, excluding lust, ambition, avarice, and all such

vices whose nurse is idleness, the mother of ignorance and melancholy herself; and in the very lap of eternity, among so many divine souls, I take my seat with so lofty a spirit and sweet content that I pity all our great ones and rich men that know not their happiness.—BURTON, *Anatomy of Melancholy.*

I do not know that I am happiest when alone; but this I am sure of, that I am never long even in the society of her I love without a yearning for the company of my lamp and my utterly confused and tumbled-over library.—BYRON, *Moore's Life.*

Montesquieu used to say that he had never known a pain or a distress that he could not soothe by half an hour of a good book.—JOHN MORLEY, *On Popular Culture.*

There is no truer word than that of Solomon: "There is no end of making books"; the sight of a great library verifies it; there is no end—indeed, it were pity there should be.—BISHOP HALL.

You that are genuine Athenians, devour with a golden Epicurism the arts and sciences, the spirits and extractions of authors.—CULVERWELL, *Light of Nature.*

He hath never fed of the dainties that are bred in a book; he hath not eat paper, as it were; he hath not drunk ink; his intellect is not replenished; he is only an animal, only sensible in the duller parts.—SHAKESPEARE, *Love's Labour 's Lost.*

I have wondered at the patience of the antediluvians; their libraries were insufficiently furnished; how then could seven or eight hundred years of life be supportable?—COWPER, *Life and Letters by Southey.*

Unconfused Babel of all tongues! which e'er
The mighty linguist Fame or Time the mighty traveller,
  That could speak or this could hear!
Majestic monument and pyramid!
Where still the shapes of parted souls abide
Embalmed in verse; exalted souls which now
Enjoy those arts they wooed so well below,

Which now all wonders plainly see
That have been, are, or are to be
In the mysterious Library,
The beatific Bodley of the Deity!

COWLEY, *Ode on the Bodleian.*

This to a structure led well known to fame,
And called, "The Monument of Vanished Minds,"
Where when they thought they saw in well-sought books
The assembled souls of all that men thought wise,
It bred such awful reverence in their looks,
As if they saw the buried writers rise.
Such heaps of written thought; gold of the dead,
Which Time does still disperse but not devour,
Made them presume all was from deluge freed
Which long-lived authors writ ere Noah's shower.

DAVENANT, *Gondibert.*

Books are not absolutely dead things, but do contain a progeny of life in them, to be as active as that soul whose progeny they are; nay, they do preserve as in a vial the purest efficacy and extraction of that living intellect that bred them.—MILTON, *Areopagitica.*

Nor is there any paternal fondness which seems to savour less of absolute instinct, and which may be so well reconciled to worldly wisdom, as this of authors for their books. These children may most truly be called the riches of their father, and many of them have with true filial piety fed their parent in his old age; so that not only the affection but the interest of the author may be highly injured by those slanderers whose poisonous breath brings his book to an untimely end.—FIELDING, *Tom Jones.*

We whom the world is pleased to honour with the title of modern authors should never have been able to compass our great design of everlasting remembrance and never-dying fame if our endeavours had not been so highly serviceable to the general good of mankind.—SWIFT, *Tale of a Tub.*

A good library always makes me melancholy, where the best author is as much squeezed and as obscure as a porter at a coronation.—SWIFT.

In my youth I never entered a great library but my predominant feeling was one of pain and disturbance of mind —not much unlike that which drew tears from Xerxes on viewing his immense army, and reflecting that in one hundred years not one soul would remain alive. To me, with respect to books, the same effect would be brought about by my own death. Here, said I, are one hundred thousand books, the worst of them capable of giving me some instruction and pleasure; and before I can have had time to extract the honey from one-twentieth of this hive in all likelihood I shall be summoned away.—De Quincey, *Letter to a young man.*

A man may be judged by his library.—Bentham.

I ever look upon a library with the reverence of a temple.—Evelyn, *to Wotton.*

"Father, I should like to learn to make gold." "And what would'st thou do if thou could'st make it?" "Why, I would build a great house and fill it with books."—Southey, *Doctor.*

What would you have more? A wife? That is none of the indispensable requisites of life. Books? That is one of them, and I have more than I can use.—David Hume, *Burton's "Life."*

Talk of the happiness of getting a great prize in the lottery! What is that to opening a box of books? The joy upon lifting up the cover must be something like that which we shall feel when Peter the porter opens the door upstairs, and says, "Please to walk in, Sir."—Southey, *Life.*

I would rather be a poor man in a garret with plenty of books than a king who did not love reading.—Macaulay.

Our books . . . do not our hearts hug them, and quiet themselves in them even more than in God?—Baxter, *Saint's Rest.*

It is our duty to live among books. Newman, *Tracts for the Times, No. 2.*

What lovely things books are!—Buckle, *Life by Huth.*

(Query) Whether the collected wisdom of all ages and nations be not found in books?—Berkeley, *Querist.*

Read we must, be writers ever so indifferent.—SHAFTESBURY, *Characteristics.*

It 's mighty hard to write nowadays without getting something or other worth listening to into your essay or your volume. The foolishest book is a kind of leaky boat on a sea of wisdom; some of the wisdom will get in anyhow.—O. W. HOLMES, *Poet at the Breakfast Table.*

I adopted the tolerating measure of the elder Pliny—"nullum esse librum tam malum ut non in aliqua parte prodesset."—GIBBON, *Autobiography.*

A book 's a book, although there 's nothing in 't.—BYRON, *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers.*

> While you converse with lords and dukes,
> I have their betters here, my books;
> Fixed in an elbow chair at ease
> I choose companions as I please.
> I 'd rather have one single shelf
> Than all my friends, except yourself.
> For, after all that can be said,
> Our best companions are the dead.
>
> SHERIDAN *to Swift.*

We often hear of people who will descend to any servility, submit to any insult for the sake of getting themselves or their children into what is euphemistically called good society. Did it ever occur to them that there is a select society of all the centuries to which they and theirs can be admitted for the asking?—LOWELL, *Speech at Chelsea.*

On all sides are we not driven to the conclusion that of all things which men can do or make here below, by far the most momentous, wonderful, and worthy are the things we call books? For, indeed, is it not verily the highest act of man's faculty that produces a book? It is the thought of man. The true thaumaturgic virtue by which man marks all things whatever. All that he does and brings to pass is the vesture of a book.—CARLYLE, *Hero Worship.*

> Yet it is just
> That here in memory of all books which lay
> Their sure foundations in the heart of man,
>
> . . . . . .

That I should here assert their rights, assert
Their honours, and should, once for all, pronounce
Their benediction, speak of them as powers
For ever to be hallowed; only less
For what we are and what we may become
Than Nature's self, which is the breath of God
Or His pure word by miracle revealed.

WORDSWORTH, *Prelude.*

Take me to some lofty room,
  Lighted from the western sky,
Where no glare dispels the gloom,
  Till the golden eve is nigh;
Where the works of searching thought,
  Chosen books, may still impart
What the wise of old have taught,
  What has tried the meek of heart;
Books in long dead tongues that stirred
  Loving hearts in other climes;
Telling to my eyes, unheard,
  Glorious deeds of olden times:
Books that purify the thought,
  Spirits of the learned dead,
Teachers of the little taught,
  Comforters when friends are fled.

BARNES, *Poems of Rural Life.*

A library is like a butcher's shop; it contains plenty of meat, but it is all raw; no person living can find a meal in it till some good cook comes along and says, "Sir, I see by your looks that you are hungry; I know your taste; be patient for a moment and you shall be satisfied that you have an excellent appetite!"—G. ELLIS, *Lockhart's "Scott."*

A library is itself a cheap university.—H. SIDGWICK, *Political Economy.*

O such a life as he resolved to live
Once he had mastered all that books can give!

BROWNING.

I will bury myself in my books and the devil may pipe to his own.—TENNYSON.

Words! words! words!—SHAKESPEARE.

# Hours in a Library

# HOURS IN A LIBRARY

## De Foe's Novels

According to the high authority of Charles Lamb, it has sometimes happened "that from no inferior merit in the rest, but from some superior good fortune in the choice of a subject, some single work" (of a particular author) "shall have been suffered to eclipse, and cast into the shade, the deserts of its less fortunate brethren." And after quoting the case of Bunyan's *Holy War*, as compared with the *Pilgrim's Progress*, he adds that, "in no instance has this excluding partiality been exerted with more unfairness than against what may be termed the secondary novels or romances of De Foe." He proceeds to declare that there are at least four other fictitious narratives by the same writer—*Roxana*, *Singleton*, *Moll Flanders*, and *Colonel Jack*—which possess an interest not inferior to *Robinson Crusoe*—"except what results from a less felicitous choice

of situation." Granting most unreservedly that the same hand is perceptible in the minor novels as in *Robinson Crusoe*, and that they bear at every page the most unequivocal symptoms of De Foe's workmanship, I venture to doubt the "partiality" and the "unfairness" of preferring to them their more popular rival. The instinctive judgment of the world is not really biassed by anything except the intrinsic power exerted by a book over its sympathies; and as in the long run it has honoured *Robinson Crusoe*, in spite of the critics, and has comparatively neglected *Roxana* and the companion stories, there is probably some good cause for the distinction. The apparent injustice to books resembles what we often see in the case of men. A. B. becomes Lord Chancellor, whilst C. D. remains for years a briefless barrister; and yet for the life of us we cannot tell but that C. D. is the abler man of the two. Perhaps he was wanting in some one of the less conspicuous elements that are essential to a successful career; he said "Open, wheat!" instead of "Open, sesame!" and the barriers remained unaffected by his magic. The secret may really be simple enough. The complete success of such a book as *Robinson* implies, it may be, the precise adaptation of the key to every ward of the lock. The felicitous choice of situation to which

Lamb refers gave just the required fitness; and it is of little use to plead that *Roxana*, *Colonel Jack*, and others might have done the same trick if only they had received a little filing, or some slight change in shape: a shoemaker might as well argue that if you had only one toe less his shoes would n't pinch you.

To leave the unsatisfactory ground of metaphor, we may find out, on examination, that De Foe had discovered in *Robinson Crusoe* precisely the field in which his talents could be most effectually applied; and that a very slight alteration in the subject-matter might change the merit of his work to a disproportionate extent. The more special the idiosyncrasy upon which a man's literary success is founded, the greater, of course, the probability that a small change will disconcert him. A man who can only perform upon the drum will have to wait for certain combinations of other instruments before his special talent can be turned to account. Now, the talent in which De Foe surpasses all other writers is just one of those peculiar gifts which must wait for a favourable chance. When a gentleman, in a fairy story, has a power of seeing a hundred miles, or covering seven leagues at a stride, we know that an opportunity will speedily occur for putting his faculties to use. But the gentleman

with the seven-leagued boots is useless when the occasion offers itself for telescopic vision, and the eyes are good for nothing without the power of locomotion. To De Foe, if we may imitate the language of the *Arabian Nights*, was given a tongue to which no one could listen without believing every word that he uttered—a qualification, by the way, which would serve its owner far more effectually in this commonplace world than swords of sharpness or cloaks of darkness or other fairy paraphernalia. In other words, he had the most marvellous power ever known of giving verisimilitude to his fictions; or, in other words again, he had the most amazing talent on record for telling lies. We have all read how the *History of the Plague*, the *Memoirs of a Cavalier*, and even, it is said, *Robinson Crusoe*, have succeeded in passing themselves off for veritable narratives. The *Memoirs of Captain Carleton* long passed for De Foe's, but the Captain has now gained admission to the biographical dictionary and is credited with his own memoirs. In either case, it is as characteristic that a genuine narrative should be attributed to De Foe, as that De Foe's narrative should be taken as genuine. An odd testimony to De Foe's powers as a liar (a word for which there is, unfortunately, no equivalent that does not imply some blame) has been men-

tioned. Mr. M'Queen, quoted in Captain Burton's *Nile Basin*, names *Captain Singleton* as a genuine account of travels in Central Africa, and seriously mentions De Foe's imaginary pirate as "a claimant for the honour of the discovery of the sources of the White Nile." Probably, however, this only proves that Mr. M'Queen had never read the book.

Most of the literary artifices to which De Foe owed his power of producing this illusion are sufficiently plain. Of all the fictions which he succeeded in palming off for truths none is more instructive than that admirable ghost, Mrs. Veal. Like the sonnets of some great poets, it contains in a few lines all the essential peculiarities of his art, and an admirable commentary has been appended to it by Sir Walter Scott. The first device which strikes us is his ingenious plan for manufacturing corroborative evidence. The ghost appears to Mrs. Bargrave. The story of the apparition is told by a "very sober and understanding gentlewoman, who lives within a few doors of Mrs. Bargrave;" and the character of this sober gentlewoman is supported by the testimony of a justice of the peace at Maidstone, "a very intelligent person." This elaborate chain of evidence is intended to divert our attention from the obvious circumstance that the

whole story rests upon the authority of the anonymous person who tells us of the sober gentlewoman, who supports Mrs. Bargrave, and is confirmed by the intelligent justice. Simple as the artifice appears, it is one which is constantly used in supernatural stories of the present day. One of those improving legends tells how a ghost appeared to two officers in Canada, and how, subsequently, one of the officers met the ghost's twin brother in London, and straightway exclaimed, "You are the person who appeared to me in Canada!" Many people are diverted from the weak part of the story by this ingenious confirmation, and, in their surprise at the coherence of the narrative, forget that the narrative itself rests upon entirely anonymous evidence. A chain is no stronger than its weakest link; but if you show how admirably the last few are united together, half the world will forget to test the security of the equally essential links which are kept out of sight. De Foe generally repeats a similar trick in the prefaces of his fictions. "'T is certain," he says, in the *Memoirs of a Cavalier*, " no man could have given a description of his retreat from Marston Moor to Rochdale, and thence over the moors to the North, in so apt and proper terms, unless he had really travelled over the ground he describes," which, indeed, is quite

true, but by no means proves that the journey was made by a fugitive from that particular battle. He separates himself more ostentatiously from the supposititious author by praising his admirable manner of relating the memoirs, and the "wonderful variety of incidents with which they are beautified;" and, with admirable impudence, assures us that they are written in so soldierly a style, that it "seems impossible any but the very person who was present in every action here related was the relater of them." In the preface to *Roxana*, he acts, with equal spirit, the character of an impartial person, giving us the evidence on which he is himself convinced of the truth of the story, as though he would, of all things, refrain from pushing us unfairly for our belief. The writer, he says, took the story from the lady's own mouth: he was, of course, obliged to disguise names and places; but was himself "particularly acquainted with this lady's first husband, the brewer, and with his father, and also with his bad circumstances, and knows that first part of the story." The rest we must, of course, take upon the lady's own evidence, but less unwillingly, as the first is thus corroborated. We cannot venture to suggest to so calm a witness that he has invented both the lady and the writer of her history; and,

in short, that when he says that A. says that B. says something, it is, after all, merely the anonymous "he" who is speaking. In giving us his authority for *Moll Flanders*, he ventures upon the more refined art of throwing a little discredit upon the narrator's veracity. She professes to have abandoned her evil ways, but, as he tells us with a kind of aside, and as it were cautioning us against over-incredulity, "it seems" (a phrase itself suggesting the impartial looker-on) that in her old age "she was not so extraordinary a penitent as she was at first; it seems only" (for, after all, you must n't make *too* much of my insinuations) "that indeed she always spoke with abhorrence of her former life." So we are left in a qualified state of confidence, as if we had been talking about one of his patients with the wary director of a reformatory.

This last touch, which is one of De Foe's favourite expedients, is most fully exemplified in the story of Mrs. Veal. The author affects to take us into his confidence, to make us privy to the pros and cons in regard to the veracity of his own characters, till we are quite disarmed. The sober gentlewoman vouches for Mrs. Bargrave; but Mrs. Bargrave is by no means allowed to have it all her own way. One of the ghost's communications related to the disposal of a certain sum of

10*l.* a year, of which Mrs. Bargrave, according to her own account, could have known nothing, except by this supernatural intervention. Mrs. Veal's friends, however, tried to throw doubt upon the story of her appearance, considering that it was disreputable for a decent woman to go abroad after her death. One of them, therefore, declared that Mrs. Bargrave was a liar, and that she had, in fact, known of the 10*l.* beforehand. On the other hand, the person who thus attacked Mrs. Bargrave had himself the "reputation of a notorious liar." Mr. Veal, the ghost's brother, was too much of a gentleman to make such gross imputations. He confined himself to the more moderate assertion that Mrs. Bargrave had been crazed by a bad husband. He maintained that the story must be a mistake, because, just before her death, his sister had declared that she had nothing to dispose of. This statement, however, may be reconciled with the ghost's remarks about the 10*l.*, because she obviously mentioned such a trifle merely by way of a token of the reality of her appearance. Mr. Veal, indeed, makes rather a better point by stating that a certain purse of gold mentioned by the ghost was found, not in the cabinet where she told Mrs. Bargrave that she had placed it, but in a comb-box. Yet, again, Mr. Veal's statement is here rather suspicious, for

it is known that Mrs. Veal was very particular about her cabinet, and would not have let her gold out of it. We are left in some doubts by this conflict of evidence, although the obvious desire of Mr. Veal to throw discredit on the story of his sister's appearance rather inclines us to believe in Mrs. Bargrave's story, who could have had no conceivable motive for inventing such a fiction. The argument is finally clenched by a decisive coincidence. The ghost wears a silk dress. In the course of a long conversation she incidentally mentioned to Mrs. Bargrave that this was a scoured silk, newly made up. When Mrs. Bargrave reported this remarkable circumstance to a certain Mrs. Wilson, "You have certainly seen her," exclaimed that lady, "for none knew but Mrs. Veal and myself that the gown had been scoured." To this crushing piece of evidence it seems that neither Mr. Veal nor the notorious liar could invent any sufficient reply.

One can almost fancy De Foe chuckling as he concocted the refinements of this most marvellous narrative. The whole artifice is, indeed, of a simple kind. Lord Sunderland, according to Macaulay, once ingeniously defended himself against a charge of treachery, by asking whether it was possible that any man should be so base as to do that which he was, in fact, in the constant

habit of doing. De Foe asks us in substance, Is it conceivable that any man should tell stories so elaborate, so complex, with so many unnecessary details, with so many inclinations of evidence this way and that, unless the stories were true? We instinctively answer, that it is, in fact, inconceivable; and, even apart from any such refinements as those noticed, the circumstantiality of the stories is quite sufficient to catch an unworthy critic. It is, indeed, perfectly easy to tell a story which shall be mistaken for a *bonâ fide* narrative, if only we are indifferent to such considerations as making it interesting or artistically satisfactory.

The praise which has been lavished upon De Foe for the verisimilitude of his novels seems to be rather extravagant. The trick would be easy enough, if it were worth performing. The story-teller cannot be cross-examined; and if he is content to keep to the ordinary level of commonplace facts, there is not the least difficulty in producing conviction. We recognise the fictitious character of an ordinary novel, because it makes a certain attempt at artistic unity, or because the facts are such as could obviously not be known to, or would not be told by, a real narrator, or possibly because they are inconsistent with other established facts. If a man chooses to avoid such obvious confessions of unreality, he can

easily be as lifelike as De Foe. I do not suppose that foreign correspondence of a newspaper is often composed in the Strand; but it is only because I believe that the honesty of writers in the press is far too great to allow them to commit a crime which must be speedily detected by independent evidence. Lying is, after all, the easiest of all things, if the liar be not too ambitious. A little clever circumstantiality will lull any incipient suspicion; and it must be added that De Foe, in adopting the tone of a *bonâ fide* narrator, not unfrequently overreaches himself. He forgets his dramatic position in his anxiety to be minute. Colonel Jack, at the end of a long career, tells us how one of his boyish companions stole certain articles at a fair, and gives us the list, of which this is a part: "5thly, a silver box, with 7*s.* in small silver; 6, a pocket-handkerchief; 7, *another;* 8, a jointed baby, and little looking-glass." The affectation of extreme precision, especially in the charming item "another," destroys the perspective of the story. We are listening to a contemporary, not to an old man giving us his fading recollections of a disreputable childhood.

The peculiar merit, then, of De Foe must be sought in something more than the circumstantial nature of his lying, or even the ingenious artifices by which he contrives to corroborate his own nar-

rative. These, indeed, show the pleasure which he took in simulating truth; and he may very probably have attached undue importance to this talent in the infancy of novel-writing, as in the infancy of painting it was held for the greatest of triumphs when birds came and pecked at the grapes in a picture. It is curious, indeed, that De Foe and Richardson, the founders of our modern school of fiction, appear to have stumbled upon their discovery by a kind of accident. As De Foe's novels are simply history *minus* the facts, so Richardson's are a series of letters *minus* the correspondents. The art of novel-writing, like the art of cooking pigs in Lamb's most philosophical as well as humorous apologue, first appeared in its most cumbrous shape. As Hoti had to burn his cottage for every dish of pork, Richardson and De Foe had to produce fiction at the expense of a close approach to falsehood. The division between the art of lying and the art of fiction was not distinctly visible to either; and both suffer to some extent from the attempt to produce absolute illusion, where they should have been content with portraiture. And yet the defect is balanced by the vigour naturally connected with an unflinching realism. That this power rested, in De Foe's case, upon something more than a bit of literary trickery, may be inferred

from his fate in another department of authorship. He twice got into trouble for a device exactly analogous to that which he afterwards practised in fiction. On both occasions he was punished for assuming a character for purposes of mystification. In the latest instance, it is seen, the pamphlet called *What if the Pretender Comes?* was written in such obvious irony, that the mistake of his intentions must have been wilful. The other and better-known performance, *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters*, seems really to have imposed upon some of his readers. It is difficult in these days of toleration to imagine that any one can have taken the violent suggestions of the *Shortest Way* as put forward seriously. To those who might say that persecuting the Dissenters was cruel, says De Foe:

> I answer, 't is cruelty to kill a snake or a toad in cold blood, but the poison of their nature makes it a charity to our neighbours to destroy those creatures, not for any personal injury received, but for prevention. . . . Serpents, toads, and vipers, &c., are noxious to the body, and poison the sensitive life: these poison the soul, corrupt our posterity, ensnare our children, destroy the vital of our happiness, our future felicity, and contaminate the whole mass.

And he concludes:

> Alas, the Church of England! What with Popery

on the one hand, and schismatics on the other, how has she been crucified between two thieves! *Now let us crucify the thieves!* Let her foundations be established upon the destruction of her enemies: the doors of mercy being always open to the returning part of the deluded people; let the obstinate be ruled with a rod of iron!

It gives a pleasant impression of the spirit of the times, to remember that this could be taken for a genuine utterance of orthodoxy; that De Foe was imprisoned and pilloried, and had to write a serious protestation that it was only a joke, and that he meant to expose the non-juring party by putting their secret wishes into plain English. "'T is hard," he says, "that this should not be perceived by all the town; that not one man can see it, either Churchman or Dissenter." It certainly was very hard; but a perusal of the whole pamphlet may make it a degree more intelligible. Ironical writing of this kind is in substance a *reductio ad absurdum*. It is a way of saying the logical result of your opinions is such or such a monstrous error. So long as the appearance of logic is preserved, the error cannot be stated too strongly. The attempt to soften the absurdity so as to take in an antagonist is injurious artistically, if it may be practically useful. An ironical intention which is quite concealed might as well not exist. And thus the unscrupulous use

of the same weapon by Swift is now far more telling than De Foe's comparatively guarded application of it. The artifice, however, is most skilfully carried out for the end which De Foe had in view. The *Shortest Way* begins with a comparative gravity to throw us off our guard; the author is not afraid of imitating a little of the dulness of his supposed antagonists, and repeats with all imaginable seriousness the very taunts which a High Church bigot would in fact have used. It was not a sound defence of persecution to say that the Dissenters had been cruel when they had the upper hand, and that penalties imposed upon them were merely retaliation for injuries suffered under Cromwell and from Scottish Presbyterians; but it was one of those topics upon which a hot-headed persecutor would naturally dwell, though De Foe gives him rather more forcible language than he would be likely to possess. It is only towards the end that the ironical purpose crops out in what we should have thought an unmistakable manner. Few writers would have preserved their incognito so long. The caricature would have been too palpable, and invited ridicule too ostentatiously. An impatient man soon frets under the mask and betrays his real strangeness in the hostile camp.

De Foe in fact had a peculiarity at first sight

less favourable to success in fiction than in controversy. Amongst the political writers of that age he was, on the whole, distinguished for good temper and an absence of violence. Although a party man, he was by no means a man to swallow the whole party platform. He walked on his own legs, and was not afraid to be called a deserter by more thorough-going partisans. The principles which he most ardently supported were those of religious toleration and hatred to every form of arbitrary power. Now, the intellectual groundwork upon which such a character is formed has certain conspicuous merits, along with certain undeniable weaknesses. Amongst the first may be reckoned a strong grasp of facts—which was developed to an almost disproportionate degree in De Foe—and a resolution to see things as they are without the gloss which is contracted from strong party sentiment. He was one of those men of vigorous common-sense, who like to have everything down plainly and distinctly in good unmistakable black and white, and indulge a voracious appetite for facts and figures. He was, therefore, able—within the limits of his vision—to see things from both sides, and to take his adversaries' opinions as calmly as his own, so long, at least, as they dealt with the class of considerations with which he was accustomed to

deal; for, indeed, there are certain regions of discussion to which we cannot be borne on the wings of statistics, or even of common-sense. And this, the weak side of his intellect, is equally unmistakable. The matter-of-fact man may be compared to one who suffers from colour-blindness. Perhaps he may have a power of penetrating, and even microscopic vision; but he sees everything, in his favourite black and white or grey, and loses all the delights of gorgeous, though it may be deceptive, colouring. One man sees everything in the forcible light and shade of Rembrandt: a few heroes stand out con picuously in a focus of brilliancy from a background of imperfectly defined shadows, clustering round the centre in strange but picturesque confusion. To another, every figure is full of interest, with singular contrasts and sharply-defined features; the whole effect is somewhat spoilt by the want of perspective and the perpetual sparkle and glitter; yet when we fix our attention upon any special part, it attracts us by its undeniable vivacity and vitality. To a third, again, the individual figures become dimmer, but he sees a slow and majestic procession of shapes imperceptibly developing into some harmonious whole. Men profess to reach their philosophical conclusions by some process of logic; but the imagination is the faculty

which furnishes the raw material upon which the logic is employed, and, unconsciously to its owners, determines, for the most part, the shape into which their theories will be moulded. Now, De Foe was above the ordinary standard, in so far as he did not, like most of us, see things merely as a blurred and inextricable chaos; but he was below the great imaginative writers in the comparative coldness and dry precision of his mental vision. To him the world was a vast picture, from which all confusion was banished; everything was definite, clear and precise as in a photograph; as in a photograph, too, everything could be accurately measured, and the result stated in figures; by the same parallel, there was a want of perspective, for the most distant objects were as precisely given as the nearest; and yet further, there was the same absence of the colouring which is caused in natural objects by light and heat, and in mental pictures by the fire of imaginative passion. The result is a product which is to Fielding or Scott what a portrait by a first-rate photographer is to one by Vandyke or Reynolds, though, perhaps, the peculiar qualifications which go to make a De Foe are almost as rare as those which form the more elevated artist.

To illustrate this a little more in detail, one curious proof of the want of the passionate

element in De Foe's novels is the singular calmness with which he describes his villains. He always looks at the matter in a purely business-like point of view. It is very wrong to steal, or break any of the commandments: partly because the chances are that it won't pay, and partly also because the devil will doubtless get hold of you in time. But a villain in De Foe is extremely like a virtuous person, only that, so to speak, he has unluckily backed the losing side. Thus, for example, Colonel Jack is a thief from his youth up; Moll Flanders is a thief, and worse; Roxana is a highly immoral lady, and is under some suspicion of a most detestable murder; and Captain Singleton is a pirate of the genuine buccaneering school. Yet we should really doubt, but for their own confessions, whether they have villainy enough amongst them to furnish an average pickpocket. Roxana occasionally talks about a hell within, and even has unpleasant dreams concerning "apparitions of devils and monsters, of falling into gulphs, and from off high and steep precipices." She has, moreover, excellent reasons for her discomfort. Still, in spite of a very erroneous course of practice, her moral tone is all that can be desired. She discourses about the importance of keeping to the paths of virtue with the most exemplary punctuality, though she does

not find them convenient for her own personal use. Colonel Jack is a young Arab of the streets —as it is fashionable to call them nowadays— sleeping in the ashes of a glass-house by night, and consorting with thieves by day. Still, the exemplary nature of his sentiments would go far to establish Lord Palmerston's rather heterodox theory of the innate goodness of man. He talks like a book from his earliest infancy. He once forgets himself so far as to rob a couple of poor women on the highway instead of picking rich men's pockets; but his conscience pricks him so much that he cannot rest till he has restored the money. Captain Singleton is a still more striking case: he is a pirate by trade, but with a strong resemblance to the ordinary British merchant in his habits of thought. He ultimately retires from a business in which the risks are too great for his taste, marries, and settles down quietly on his savings. There is a certain Quaker who joins his ship, really as a volunteer, but under a show of compulsion, in order to avoid the possible inconveniences of a capture. The Quaker always advises him in his difficulties in such a way as to avoid responsibility. When they are in action with a Portuguese man-of-war, for example, the Quaker sees a chance of boarding, and, coming up to Singleton, says very calmly, "Friend, what

dost thou mean? why dost thou not visit thy neighbour in the ship, the door being open for thee?" This ingenious gentleman always preserves as much humanity as is compatible with his peculiar position, and even prevents certain negroes from being tortured into confession, on the unanswerable ground that, as neither party understands a word of the other's language, the confession will not be to much purpose. "It is no compliment to my moderation," says Singleton, "to say I was convinced by these reasons; and yet we had all much ado to keep our second lieutenant from murdering some of them to make them tell."

Now, this humane pirate takes up pretty much the position which De Foe's villains generally occupy in good earnest. They do very objectionable things; but they always speak like steady respectable Englishmen, with an eye to the main chance. It is true that there is nothing more difficult than to make a villain tell his own story naturally; in a way, that is, so as to show at once the badness of the motive and the excuse by which the actor reconciles it to his own mind. De Foe is entirely deficient in this capacity of appreciating a character different from his own. His actors are merely so many repetitions of himself placed under different circumstances and

committing crimes in the way of business, as De Foe might himself have carried out a commercial transaction. From the outside they are perfect; they are evidently copied from the life; and Captain Singleton is himself a repetition of the celebrated Captain Kidd, who indeed is mentioned in the novel. But of the state of mind which leads a man to be a pirate, and of the effects which it produces upon his morals, De Foe has either no notion or is, at least, totally incapable of giving us a representation. All which goes by the name of psychological analysis in modern fiction is totally alien to his art. He could, as we have said, show such dramatic power as may be implied in transporting himself to a different position, and looking at matters even from his adversary's point of view; but of the further power of appreciating his adversary's character he shows not the slightest trace. He looks at his actors from the outside, and gives us with wonderful minuteness all the details of their lives; but he never seems to remember that within the mechanism whose working he describes there is a soul very different from that of Daniel De Foe. Rather, he seems to see in mankind nothing but so many million Daniel De Foes; they are in all sorts of postures, and thrown into every variety of difficulty, but the stuff of which they are composed is

identical with that which he buttons into his own coat; there is variety of form, but no colouring, in his pictures of life.

We may ask again, therefore, what is the peculiar source of De Foe's power? He has little or no dramatic power, in the higher sense of the word, which implies sympathy with many characters and varying tones of mind. If he had written *Henry IV.*, Falstaff, and Hotspur, and Prince Hal would all have been as like each other as are generally the first and second murderer. Nor is the mere fact that he tells a story with a strange appearance of veracity sufficient; for a story may be truth-like and yet deadly dull. Indeed, no candid critic can deny that this is the case with some of De Foe's narratives; as, for example, the latter part of *Colonel Jack*, where the details of management of a plantation in Virginia are sufficiently uninteresting in spite of the minute financial details. One device, which he occasionally employs with great force, suggests an occasional source of interest. It is generally reckoned as one of his most skilful tricks that in telling a story he cunningly leaves a few stray ends, which are never taken up. Such is the well-known incident of Xury in *Robinson Crusoe*. This contrivance undoubtedly gives an appearance of authenticity, by increasing the resemblance to real narratives;

it is like the trick of artificially roughening a stone after it has been fixed into a building, to give it the appearance of being fresh from the quarry. De Foe, however, frequently extracts a more valuable piece of service from these loose ends. The situation which has been most praised in De Foe's novels is that which occurs at the end of *Roxana*. Roxana, after a life of wickedness, is at last married to a substantial merchant. She has saved from the wages of sin the convenient sum of 2,056*l.* a year, secured upon excellent mortgages. Her husband has 17,000*l.* in cash, after deducting a "black article of 8,000 pistoles," due on account of a certain lawsuit in Paris, and 1,320*l.* a year in rent. There is a satisfaction about these definite sums which we seldom receive from the vague assertions of modern novelists. Unluckily, a girl turns up at this moment who shows great curiosity about Roxana's history. It soon becomes evident that she is, in fact, Roxana's daughter by a former and long since deserted husband; but she cannot be acknowledged without a revelation of her mother's subsequently most disreputable conduct. Now, Roxana has a devoted maid, who threatens to get rid, by fair means or foul, of this importunate daughter. Once she fails in her design, but confesses to her mistress that, if necessary, she will commit the

murder. Roxana professes to be terribly shocked, but yet has a desire to be relieved at almost any price from her tormentor. The maid thereupon disappears again; soon afterwards the daughter disappears too; and Roxana is left in terrible doubt, tormented by the opposing anxieties that her maid may have murdered her daughter, or that her daughter may have escaped and revealed the mother's true character. Here is a telling situation for a sensation novelist; and the minuteness with which the story is worked out, whilst we are kept in suspense, supplies the place of the ordinary rant; to say nothing of the increased effect due to apparent veracity, in which certainly few sensation novelists can even venture a distant competition. The end of the story differs still more widely from modern art. Roxana has to go abroad with her husband, still in a state of doubt. Her maid after a time joins her, but gives no intimation as to the fate of the daughter; and the story concludes by a simple statement that Roxana afterwards fell into well deserved misery. The mystery is certainly impressive; and Roxana is heartily afraid of the devil and the gallows, to say nothing of the chance of losing her fortune. Whether, as Lamb maintained, the conclusion in which the mystery is cleared up is a mere forgery, or was added by De Foe to satisfy

the ill-judged curiosity of his readers, I do not profess to decide. Certainly it rather spoils the story; but in this, as in some other cases, one is often left in doubt as to the degree in which De Foe was conscious of his own merits.

Another instance on a smaller scale of the effective employment of judicious silence, is an incident in *Captain Singleton*. The Quaker of our acquaintance meets with a Japanese priest who speaks a few words of English, and explains that he has learnt it from thirteen Englishmen, the only remnant of thirty-two who had been wrecked on the coast of Japan. To confirm his story, he produces a bit of paper on which is written, in plain English words, "We came from Greenland and from the North Pole." Here are claimants for the discovery of a North-west Passage, of whom we would gladly hear more. Unluckily, when Captain Singleton comes to the place where his Quaker had met the priest, the ship in which he was sailing had departed; and this put an end to an inquiry, and perhaps "may have disappointed mankind of one of the most noble discoveries that ever was made or will again be made, in the world, for the good of mankind in general; but so much for that."

In these two fragments, which illustrate a very common device of De Foe's, we come across two

elements of positive power over our imaginations. Even De Foe's imagination recognised and delighted in a certain margin of mystery to this harsh world of facts and figures. He is generally too anxious to set everything before us in broad daylight; there is too little of the thoughts and emotions which inhabit the twilight of the mind; of those dim half-seen forms which exercise the strongest influence upon the imagination, and are the most tempting subjects for the poet's art. De Foe, in truth, was little enough of a poet. Sometimes by mere force of terse idiomatic language he rises into real poetry, as it was understood in the days when Pope and Dryden were our lawgivers. It is often really vigorous. The well-known verses—

> Wherever God erects a house of prayer
> The devil always builds a chapel there—

which begin the *True-born Englishman*, or the really fine lines which occur in the *Hymn to the Pillory*, that "hieroglyphic state machine, contrived to punish fancy in," and ending—

> Tell them that placed him here,
> They 're scandals to the times,
> Are at a loss to find his guilt,
> *And can't commit his crimes*—

may stand for specimens of his best manner.

More frequently he degenerates into the merest doggerel, *e. g.*—

> No man was ever yet so void of sense,
> As to debate the right of self-defence,
> A principle so grafted in the mind,
> With nature born, and does like nature bind;
> Twisted with reason, and with nature too,
> As neither one nor t 'other can undo—

which is scarcely a happy specimen of the difficult art of reasoning in verse. His verse is at best vigorous epigrammatic writing, such as would now be converted into leading articles, twisted with more or less violence into rhyme. And yet there is a poetical side to his mind, or at least a susceptibility to poetical impressions of a certain order. And as a novelist is on the border-line between poetry and prose, and novels should be, as it were, prose saturated with poetry, we may expect to come in this direction upon the secret of De Foe's power. Although De Foe for the most part deals with good tangible subjects, which he can weigh and measure and reduce to moidores and pistoles, the mysterious has a very strong though peculiar attraction for him. It is indeed that vulgar kind of mystery which implies nothing of reverential awe. He was urged by a restless curiosity to get away from this common-place world, and reduce the unknown regions

beyond to scale and measure. The centre of Africa, the wilds of Siberia, and even more distinctly the world of spirits, had wonderful charms for him. Nothing would have given him greater pleasure than to determine the exact number of the fallen angels and the date of their calamity. In the *History of the Devil* he touches, with a singular kind of humorous gravity, upon several of these questions, and seems to apologise for his limited information. "Several things," he says, "have been suggested to set us a-calculating the number of this frightful throng of devils who, with Satan the master-devil, was thus cast out of heaven." He declines the task, though he quotes with a certain pleasure the result obtained by a grave calculator, who found that in the first line of Satan's army there were a thousand times a hundred thousand million devils, and more in the other two. He gives a kind of arithmetical measure of the decline of the devil's power by pointing out that "he who was once equal to the angel who killed eighty thousand men in one night, is not able now, without a new commission, to take away the life of one Job." He is filled with curiosity as to the proceedings of the first parliament (p———t as he delicately puts it) of devils; he regrets that as he was not personally present in that "black divan"—at least, not that he can

remember, for who can account for his pre-existent state?—he cannot say what happened; but he adds,

> If I had as much personal acquaintance with the devil as would admit it, and could depend upon the truth of what answer he would give me, the first question would be, what measures they (the devils) resolved on at their first assembly?

and the second how they employed the time between their fall and the creation of the man? Here we see the instinct of the politician; and we may add that De Foe is thoroughly dissatisfied with Milton's statements upon this point, though admiring his genius; and goes so far as to write certain verses intended as a correction of, or interpolation into, *Paradise Lost.*

Mr. Ruskin, in comparing Milton's Satan with Dante's, somewhere remarks that the vagueness of Milton, as compared with the accurate measurements given by Dante, is so far a proof of less activity of the imaginative faculty. It is easier to leave the devil's stature uncertain than to say that he was eighteen feet high. Without disputing the proposition as Mr. Ruskin puts it, we fancy that he would scarcely take De Foe's poetry as an improvement in dignity upon Milton's. We may, perhaps, guess at its merits from

this fragment of a speech in prose, addressed to Adam by Eve:

> What ails the sot? [says the new termagant]. What are you afraid of? . . . Take it, you fool, and eat. . . . Take it, I say, or I will go and cut down the tree, and you shall never eat any of it at all; and you shall still be a fool, and be governed by your wife for ever.

This, and much more gross buffoonery of the same kind, is apparently intended to recommend certain sound moral aphorisms to the vulgar; but the cool arithmetical method by which De Foe investigates the history of the devil, his anxiety to pick up gossip about him, and the view which he takes of him as a very acute and unscrupulous politician—though impartially vindicating him for some of Mr. Milton's aspersions—is exquisitely characteristic.

If we may measure the imaginative power of great poets by the relative merits of their conceptions of Satan, we might find a humbler gauge for inferior capacities in the power of summoning awe-inspiring ghosts. The difficulty of the feat is extreme. Your ghost, as Bottom would have said, is a very fearful wild-fowl to bring upon the stage. He must be handled delicately, or he is spoilt. Scott has a good ghost or two; but Lord Lytton, almost the only writer who has recently

dealt with the supernatural, draws too freely upon our belief, and creates only melodramatic spiritual beings, with a strong dash of the vulgarising element of modern "spiritualism." They are scarcely more awful beings than the terrible creation of the raw-head-and-bloody-bones school of fiction.

Amongst this school we fear that De Foe must, on the whole, be reckoned. We have already made acquaintance with Mrs. Veal, who, in her ghostly condition, talks for an hour and three-quarters with a gossip over a cup of tea; who, indeed, so far forgets her ghostly condition as to ask for a cup of the said tea, and only evades the consequences of her blunder by one of those rather awkward excuses which we all sometimes practice in society; and who, in short, is the least ethereal spirit that was ever met with outside a table. De Foe's extraordinary love for supernatural stories of the gossiping variety found vent in *A History of Apparitions* and his *System of Magic*. The position which he takes up is a kind of modified rationalism. He believes that there are genuine apparitions which personate our dead friends, and give us excellent pieces of advice on occasion; but he refuses to believe that the spirits can appear themselves, on account "of the many strange inconveniences and ill consequences which would happen if the souls of men and women,

unembodied and departed, were at liberty to visit the earth." De Foe is evidently as familiar with the habits of spirits generally as of the devil. In that case, for example, the feuds of families would never die, for the injured person would be always coming back to right himself. He proceeds upon this principle to account for many apparitions, as, for example, one which appeared in the likeness of a certain J. O. of the period, and strongly recommended his widow to reduce her expenses. He won't believe that the Virgin appeared to St. Francis, because all stories of that kind are mere impostures of the priests; but he thinks it very likely that he was haunted by the devil, who may have sometimes taken the Virgin's shape. In the *History of Witchcraft* De Foe tells us how, as he was once riding in the country, he met a man on the way to inquire of a certain wizard. De Foe, according to his account, which may or may not be intended as authentic, waited the whole of the next day at a public-house in a country-town, in order to hear the result of the inquiry; and had long conversations, reported in his usual style, with infinite "says he's" and "says I's," in which he tried to prove that the wizard was an impostor. This lets us into the secret of many of De Foe's apparitions. They are the ghosts that frighten villagers as they cross commons late at

night, or that rattle chains and display lights in haunted houses. Sometimes they have vexed knavish attorneys by discovering long-hidden deeds. Sometimes they have enticed highwaymen into dark corners of woods, and there the wretched criminal finds in their bags (for ghosts of this breed have good substantial luggage) nothing but a halter and a bit of silver (value exactly 13½*d.*) to pay the hangman. When he turns to the owner, he has vanished. Occasionally, they are the legends told by some passing traveller from distant lands—probably genuine superstitions in their origin, but amplified by tradition into marvellous exactitude of detail, and garnished with long gossiping conversations. Such a ghost, which, on the whole, is my favourite, is the mysterious Owke Mouraski. This being, whether devil or good spirit, no man knows, accompanied a traveller for four years through the steppes of Russia, and across Norway, Turkey, and various other countries. On the march he was always seen a mile to the left of the party, keeping parallel with them, in glorious indifference to roads. He crossed rivers without bridges, and the sea without ships. Everywhere, in the wild countries, he was known by name and dreaded ; for if he entered a house, some one would die there within a year. Yet he was good

to the traveller, going so far, indeed, on one occasion, as to lend him a horse, and frequently treating him to good advice. Towards the end of the journey Owke Mouraski informed his companion that he was "the inhabitant of an invisible region," and afterwards became very familiar with him. The traveller, indeed, would never believe that his friend was a devil, a scepticism of which De Foe doubtfully approves. The story, however, must be true, because, as De Foe says, he saw it in manuscript many years ago; and certainly Owke is of a superior order to most of the pot-house ghosts.

De Foe, doubtless, had an insatiable appetite for legends of this kind, talked about them with infinite zest in innumerable gossips, and probably smoked pipes and consumed ale in abundance during the process. The ghosts are the substantial creations of the popular fancy, which no longer nourished itself upon a genuine faith in a more lofty order of spiritual beings. It is superstition become gross and vulgar before it disappears for ever. Romance and poetry have pretty well departed from these ghosts, as from the witches of the period, who are little better than those who still linger in our country villages and fill corners of newspapers, headed "Superstition in the nineteenth century." In his novels De Foe's instinct

for probability generally enables him to employ the marvellous moderately, and, therefore, effectively; he is specially given to dreams; they are generally verified just enough to leave us the choice of credulity or scepticism, and are in excellent keeping with the supposed narrator. Roxana tells us how one morning she suddenly sees her lover's face as though it were a death's head, and his clothes covered with blood. In the evening the lover is murdered. One of Moll Flanders' husbands hears her call him at a distance of many miles—a supersition, by the way, in which Boswell, if not Johnson, fully believed. De Foe shows his usual skill in sometimes making the visions or omens fail of a too close fulfilment, as in the excellent dream where Robinson Crusoe hears Friday's father tell him of the sailors' attempt to murder the Spaniards: no part of the dream, as he says, is specifically true, though it has a general truth; and hence we may, at our choice, suppose it to have been supernatural, or to be merely a natural result of Crusoe's anxiety. This region of the marvellous, however, only affects De Foe's novels in a subordinate degree. The Owke Mouraski suggests another field in which a lover of the mysterious could then find room for his imagination. The world still presented a boundless wilderness of untravelled land. Mapped and ex-

plored territory was still a bright spot surrounded by chaotic darkness, instead of the two being in the reverse proportions. Geographers might fill up huge tracts by writing "here is much gold," or putting "elephants instead of towns." De Foe's gossiping acquaintance, when they were tired of ghosts, could tell of strange adventures in wild seas, where merchantmen followed a narrow track, exposed to the assaults of pirates; or of long journeys over endless steppes, in the days when travelling was travelling indeed; when distances were reckoned by months, and men might expect to meet undiscovered tribes and monsters unimagined by natural historians. Doubtless he had listened greedily to the stories of sea-faring men and merchants from the Gold Coast or the East. *Captain Singleton*, to omit *Robinson Crusoe* for the present, shows the form into which these stories moulded themselves in his mind. Singleton, besides his other exploits, anticipated Livingstone in crossing Africa from sea to sea. De Foe's biographers rather unnecessarily, admire the marvellous way in which his imaginary descriptions have been confirmed by later travellers. And it is true that Singleton found two great lakes, which may, if we please, be identified with those of recent discoverers. His other guesses are not surprising. As a specimen of the mode in which he filled up

the unknown space we may mention that he covers the desert "with a kind of thick moss of a blackish dead colour," which is not a very impressive phenomenon. It is in the matter of wild beasts, however, that he is strongest. Their camp is in one place surrounded by "innumerable numbers of devilish creatures." These creatures were as "thick as a drove of bullocks coming to a fair," so that they could not fire without hitting some; in fact, a volley brought down three tigers and two wolves, besides one creature "of an ill-gendered kind, between a tiger and a leopard." Before long they met an "ugly, venomous, deformed kind of a snake or serpent," which had "a hellish, ugly, deformed look and voice;" indeed, they would have recognised in it the being who most haunted De Foe's imaginary world—the devil—except that they could not think what business the devil could have where there were no people. The fauna of this country, besides innumerable lions, tigers, leopards, and elephants, comprised "living creatures as big as calves, but not of that kind," and creatures between a buffalo and a deer, which resembled neither; they had no horns, but legs like a cow, with a fine head and neck, like a deer. The "ill-gendered" beast is an admirable specimen of De Foe's workmanship. It shows his moderation under most tempting

circumstances. No dog-headed men, no men with eyes in their breasts, or feet that serve as umbrellas, will suit him. He must have something new, and yet probable; and he hits upon a very serviceable animal in this mixture between a tiger and a leopard. Surely no one could refuse to honour such a moderate draft upon his imagination. In short, De Foe, even in the wildest of regions, where his pencil might have full play, sticks closely to the commonplace, and will not venture beyond the regions of the easily conceivable.

The final element in which De Foe's curiosity might find a congenial food consisted of the stories floating about contemporary affairs. He had talked with men who had fought in the Great Rebellion, or even in the old German wars. He had himself been out with Monmouth, and taken part in the fight at Sedgemoor. Doubtless that small experience of actual warfare gave additional vivacity to his descriptions of battles, and was useful to him, as Gibbon declares that his service with the militia was of some assistance in describing armies of a very different kind. There is a period in history which has a peculiar interest for all of us. It is that which lies upon the borderland between the past and present; which has gathered some romance from the lapse of time,

and yet is not so far off but that we have seen some of the actors, and can distinctly realise the scenes in which they took part. Such to the present generation is the era of the Revolutionary wars. "Old men still creep among us," who lived through that period of peril and excitement, and yet we are far enough removed from them to fancy that there were giants in those days. When De Foe wrote his novels the battles of the great Civil War and the calamities of the Plague were passing through this phase; and to them we owe two of his most interesting books, the *Memoirs of a Cavalier* and the *History of the Plague*.

When such a man spins us a yarn the conditions of its being interesting are tolerably simple. The first condition obviously is, that the plot must be a good one, and good in the sense that a representation in dumb-show must be sufficiently exciting, without the necessity of any explanation of motives. The novel of sentiment or passion or character would be altogether beyond his scope. He will accumulate any number of facts and details; but they must be such as will speak for themselves without the need of an interpreter. For this reason we do not imagine that *Roxana*, *Moll Flanders*, *Colonel Jack*, or *Captain Singleton* can fairly claim any higher interest than that which belongs to the ordinary police report, given

with infinite fulness and vivacity of detail. In each of them there are one or two forcible situations. Roxana pursued by her daughter, Moll Flanders in prison, and Colonel Jack as a young boy of the streets, are powerful fragments, and well adapted for his peculiar method. He goes on heaping up little significant facts, till we are able to realise the situation powerfully, and we may then supply the sentiment for ourselves. But he never seems to know his own strength. He gives us at equal length, and with the utmost plain-speaking, the details of a number of other positions, which are neither interesting nor edifying. He is decent or coarse, just as he is dull or amusing, without knowing the difference. The details about the different connections formed by Roxana and Moll Flanders have no atom of sentiment, and are about as wearisome as the journal of a specially heartless lady of the same character would be at the present day. He has been praised for never gilding objectionable objects, or making vice attractive. To all appearance, he would have been totally unable to set about it. He has only one mode of telling a story, and he follows the thread of his narrative into the back-slums of London, or lodging-houses of doubtful character, or respectable places of trade, with the same equanimity, at a good steady jog-trot of narrative.

The absence of any passion or sentiment deprives such places of the one possible source of interest; and we must confess that two-thirds of each of these novels are deadly dull; the remainder, though exhibiting specimens of his genuine power, is not far enough from the commonplace to be specially attractive. In short, the merit of De Foe's narrative bears a direct proportion to the intrinsic merit of a plain statement of the facts; and, in the novels already mentioned, as there is nothing very surprising, certainly nothing unique, about the story, his treatment cannot raise it above a very moderate level.

Above these stories comes De Foe's best fragment of fictitious history.[1] The *Memoirs of a Cavalier* is a very amusing book, though it is less fiction than history, interspersed with a few personal anecdotes. In it there are some exquisite little bits of genuine De Foe. The Cavalier tells us, with such admirable frankness, that he once left the army a day or two before a battle, in order to visit some relatives at Bath, and excuses himself so modestly for his apparent neglect of military duty, that we cannot refuse to believe in him. A novelist, we say, would have certainly taken us to the battle, or would, at least, have

[1] De Foe may have had some materials for this story; but there seems to be little doubt that it is substantially his own.

given his hero a more heroic excuse. The character, too, of the old soldier, who has served under Gustavus Adolphus, who is disgusted with the raw English levies, still more disgusted with the interference of parsons, and who has a respect for his opponents—especially Sir Thomas Fairfax—which is compounded partly of English love of fair play, and partly of the indifference of a professional officer—is better supported than most of De Foe's personages. An excellent Dugald Dalgetty touch is his constant anxiety to impress upon the Royalist commanders the importance of a particular trick which he has learned abroad of mixing foot soldiers with the cavalry. We must leave him, however, to say a few words upon the *History of the Plague*, which seems to come next in merit to *Robinson Crusoe*. Here De Foe has to deal with a story of such intrinsically tragic interest that all his details become affecting. It needs no commentary to interpret the meaning of the terrible anecdotes, many of which are doubtless founded on fact. There is the strange superstitious element brought out by the horror of the sudden visitation. The supposed writer hesitates as to leaving the doomed city. He is decided to stay at last by opening the Bible at random and coming upon the text, "He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome

pestilence." He watches the comets: the one which appeared before the Plague was "of a dull, languid colour, and its motion heavy, solemn, and slow;" the other, which preceded the Great Fire, was "bright and sparkling, and its motion swift and furious." Old women, he says, believed in them, especially "the hypochondriac part of the other sex," who might, he thinks, be called old women too. Still he half-believes himself, especially when the second appears. He does not believe that the breath of the plague-stricken upon a glass would leave shapes of "dragons, snakes, and devils, horrible to behold;" but he does believe that if they breathed on a bird they would kill it, or "at least make its eggs rotten." However, he admits that no experiments were tried. Then we have the hideous, and sometimes horribly grotesque, incidents. There is the poor naked creature, who runs up and down, exclaiming continually, "Oh, the great and the dreadful God!" but would say nothing else, and speak to no one. There is the woman who suddenly opens a window and "calls out, 'Death, death, death!' in a most inimitable tone, which struck me with horror and chillness in the very blood." There is the man who, with death in his face, opens the door to a young apprentice sent to ask him for money: "Very well, child," says the living ghost;

"go to Cripplegate Church, and bid them ring the bell for me;" and with those words shuts the door, goes upstairs, and dies. Then we have the horrors of the dead-cart, and the unlucky piper who was carried off by mistake. De Foe, with his usual ingenuity, corrects the inaccurate versions of the story, and says that the piper was not blind, but only old and silly; and that he does not believe that, as "the story goes," he set up his pipes while in the cart. After this we cannot refuse to admit that he was really carried off and all but buried. Another device for cheating us into acceptance of his story is the ingenious way in which he imitates the occasional lapses of memory of a genuine narrator, and admits that he does not precisely recollect certain details; and still better is the conscientious eagerness with which he distinguishes between the occurrences of which he was an eye-witness and those which he only knew by hearsay.

This book, more than any of the others, shows a skill in selecting telling incidents. We are sometimes in doubt whether the particular details which occur in other stories are not put in rather by good luck than from a due perception of their value. He thus resembles a savage, who is as much pleased with a glass bead as with a piece of gold; but in the *History of the Plague* every

detail goes straight to the mark. At one point he cannot help diverging into the story of three poor men who escape into the fields, and giving us, with his usual relish, all their rambling conversations by the way. For the most part, however, he is less diffusive and more pointed than usual; the greatness of the calamity seems to have given more intensity to his style; and it leaves all the impression of a genuine narrative, told by one who has, as it were, just escaped from the valley of the shadow of death, with the awe still upon him, and every terrible sight and sound fresh in his memory. The amazing truthfulness of the style is here in its proper place; we wish to be brought as near as may be to the facts; we want good realistic painting more than fine sentiment. The story reminds us of certain ghastly photographs published during the American War, which had been taken on the field of battle. They gave a more forcible impression of the horrors of war than the most thrilling pictures drawn from the fancy. In such cases we only wish the narrator to stand as much as possible on one side, and just draw up a bit of the curtain which conceals his gallery of horrors.

It is time, however, to say enough of *Robinson Crusoe* to justify its traditional superiority to De Foe's other writings. The charm, as some critics

say, is difficult to analyse; and I do not profess to demonstrate mathematically that it must necessarily be, what it is, the most fascinating boy's book ever written, and one which older critics may study with delight. The most obvious advantage over the secondary novels lies in the unique situation. Lamb, in the passage from which I have quoted, gracefully evades this point. "Are there no solitudes," he says, "out of the cave and the desert? or cannot the heart, in the midst of crowds, feel frightfully alone?" Singleton, he suggests, is alone with pirates less merciful than the howling monsters, the devilish serpents, and ill-gendered creatures of De Foe's deserts. Colonel Jack is alone amidst the London thieves when he goes to bury his treasures in the hollow tree. This is prettily said; but it suggests rather what another writer might have made of De Foe's heroes, than what De Foe made of them himself. Singleton, it is true, is alone amongst the pirates, but he takes to them as naturally as a fish takes to the water, and, indeed, finds them a good, honest, respectable, stupid sort of people. They stick by him and he by them, and we are never made to feel the real horrors of his position. Colonel Jack might, in other hands, have become an Oliver Twist, less real perhaps than De Foe has made him, but infinitely more pathetic. De Foe

tells us of his unpleasant sleeping-places, and his occasional fears of the gallows; but of the supposed mental struggles, of the awful solitude of soul, we hear nothing. How can we sympathise very deeply with a young gentleman whose recollections run chiefly upon the exact numbers of shillings and pence captured by himself and his pocket-picking "pals"? Similarly Robinson Crusoe dwells but little upon the horrors of his position, and when he does is apt to get extremely prosy. We fancy that he could never have been in want of a solid sermon on Sunday, however much he may have missed the church-going bell. But in *Robinson Crusoe*, as in the *History of the Plague*, the story speaks for itself. To explain the horrors of living among thieves, we must have some picture of internal struggles, of a sense of honour opposed to temptation, and a pure mind in danger of contamination. De Foe's extremely straightforward and prosaic view of life prevents him from setting any such sentimental trials before us; the lad avoids the gallows, and in time becomes the honest master of a good plantation; and there 's enough. But the horrors of abandonment on a desert island can be appreciated by the simplest sailor or schoolboy. The main thing is to bring out the situation plainly and forcibly, to tell us of the difficulties of making pots and pans,

of catching goats and sowing corn, and of avoiding audacious cannibals. This task De Foe performs with unequalled spirit and vivacity. In his first discovery of a new art he shows the freshness so often conspicuous in first novels. The scenery was just that which had peculiar charms for his fancy; it was one of those half-true legends of which he had heard strange stories from seafaring men, and possibly from the acquaintances of his hero himself. He brings out the shrewd vigorous character of the Englishman thrown upon his own resources with evident enjoyment of his task. Indeed, De Foe tells us very emphatically that in Robinson Crusoe he saw a kind of allegory of his own fate. He had suffered from solitude of soul. Confinement in his prison is represented in the book by confinement in an island; and even a particular incident, here and there, such as the fright he receives one night from something in his bed, "was word for word a history of what happened." In other words, this novel too, like many of the best ever written, has in it the autobiographical element which makes a man speak from greater depths of feeling than in a purely imaginary story.

It would indeed be easy to show that the story, though in one sense marvellously like truth, is singularly wanting as a psychological study.

Friday is no real savage, but a good English servant without plush. He says "muchee" and "speakee," but he becomes at once a civilised being, and in his first conversation puzzles Crusoe terribly by that awkward theological question, why God did not kill the devil—for characteristically enough Crusoe's first lesson includes a little instruction upon the enemy of mankind. He found, however, that it was "not so easy to imprint right notions in Friday's mind about the devil, as it was about the being of a God." This is comparatively a trifle; but Crusoe himself is all but impossible. Steele, indeed, gives an account of Selkirk, from which he infers that "this plain man's story is a memorable example that he is happiest who confines his wants to natural necessities;" but the facts do not warrant this pet doctrine of an old-fashioned school. Selkirk's state of mind may be inferred from two or three facts. He had almost forgotten to talk; he had learnt to catch goats by hunting them on foot; and he had acquired the exceedingly difficult art of making fire by rubbing two sticks. In other words, his whole mind was absorbed in providing a few physical necessities, and he was rapidly becoming a savage — for a man who can't speak and can make fire is very near the Australian. We may infer, what is probable from other cases,

that a man living fifteen years by himself, like Crusoe, would either go mad or sink into the semi-savage state. De Foe really describes a man in prison, not in solitary confinement. We should not be so pedantic as to call for accuracy in such matters; but the difference between the fiction and what we believe would have been the reality is significant. De Foe, even in *Robinson Crusoe*, gives a very inadequate picture of the mental torments to which his hero is exposed. He is frightened by a parrot calling him by name, and by the strangely picturesque incident of the footmark on the sand; but, on the whole, he takes his imprisonment with preternatural stolidity. His stay on the island produces the same state of mind as might be due to a dull Sunday in Scotland. For this reason, the want of power in describing emotion as compared with the amazing power of describing facts, *Robinson Crusoe* is a book for boys rather than men, and, as Lamb says, for the kitchen rather than for higher circles. It falls short of any high intellectual interest. When we leave the striking situation and get to the second part, with the Spaniards and Will Atkins talking natural theology to his wife, it sinks to the level of the secondary stories. But for people who are not too proud to take a rather low order of amusement,

*Robinson Crusoe* will always be one of the most charming of books. We have the romantic and adventurous incidents upon which the most unflinching realism can be set to work without danger of vulgarity. Here is precisely the story suited to De Foe's strength and weakness. He is forced to be artistic in spite of himself. He cannot lose the thread of the narrative and break it into disjointed fragments, for the limits of the island confine him as well as his hero. He cannot tire us with details, for all the details of such a story are interesting; it is made up of petty incidents, as much as the life of a prisoner reduced to taming flies, or making saws out of penknives. The island does as well as the Bastille for making trifles valuable to the sufferer and to us. The facts tell the story of themselves, without any demand for romantic power to press them home to us; and the efforts to give an air of authenticity to the story, which sometimes make us smile, and sometimes rather bore us, in other novels are all to the purpose; for there is a real point in putting such a story in the mouth of the sufferer, and in giving us for the time an illusory belief in his reality. It is one of the exceptional cases in which the poetical aspect of a position is brought out best by the most prosiac accuracy of detail; and we imagine that Robinson Crusoe's island,

with all his small household torments, will always be more impressive than the more gorgeously coloured island of Enoch Arden. When we add that the whole book shows the freshness of a writer employed on his first novel—though at the mature age of fifty-eight; seeing in it an allegory of his own experience embodied in the scenes which most interested his imagination, we see some reasons why *Robinson Crusoe* should hold a distinct rank by itself amongst his works. As De Foe was a man of very powerful but very limited imagination—able to see certain aspects of things with extraordinary distinctness, but little able to rise above them—even his greatest book shows his weakness, and scarcely satisfies a grown-up man with a taste for high art. In revenge, it ought, according to Rousseau, to be for a time the whole library of a boy, chiefly, it seems, to teach him that the stock of an ironmonger is better than that of a jeweller. We may agree in the conclusion without caring about the reason; and to have pleased all the boys in Europe for near a hundred and fifty years is, after all, a remarkable feat.

One remark must be added, which scarcely seems to have been sufficiently noticed by De Foe's critics. He cannot be understood unless we remember that he was primarily and essentially a

journalist, and that even his novels are part of his journalism. He was a pioneer in the art of newspaper writing, and anticipated with singular acuteness many later developments of his occupation. The nearest parallel to him is Cobbett, who wrote still better English, though he could hardly have written a *Robinson Crusoe*. De Foe, like Cobbett, was a sturdy middle-class Englishman, and each was in his time the most effective advocate of the political views of his class. De Foe represented the Whiggism, not of the great "junto" or aristocratic ring, but of the dissenters and tradesmen whose prejudices the junto had to turn to account. He would have stood by Chatham in the time of Wilkes and of the American War; he would have demanded parliamentary reform in the time of Brougham and Bentham, and he would have been a follower of the Manchester school in the time of Bright and Cobden. We all know the type, and have made up our minds as to its merits. When De Foe came to be a subject of biography in this century, he was of course praised for his enlightenment by men of congenial opinions. He was held up as a model politician, not only for his creed but for his independence. The revelations of his last biographer, Mr. Lee, showed unfortunately that considerable deductions must be made from the

independence. He was, as we now know, in the pay of Government for many years, while boasting of his perfect purity; he was transferred, like a mere dependent, from the Whigs to the Tories and back again. In the reign of George I. he consented to abandon his character in order to act as a spy upon unlucky Jacobite colleagues. It is to the credit of Harley's acuteness that he was the first English minister to make a systematic use of the press and was the patron both of Swift and De Foe. But to use the press was then to make a mere tool of the author. De Foe was a journalist, living, and supporting a family, by his pen, in the days when a journalist had to choose between the pillory and dependence. He soon had enough of the pillory and preferred to do very dirty services for his employer. Other journalists, I fear, since his day have consented to serve masters whom in their hearts they disapproved. It may, I think, be fairly said on behalf of De Foe that in the main he worked for causes of which he really approved; that he never sacrificed the opinions to which he was most deeply attached; that his morality was, at worst, above that of many contemporary politicians; and that, in short, he had a conscience, though he could not afford to obey it implicitly. He says himself, and I think the statement has its pathetic

side, that he made a kind of compromise with that awkward instinct. He praised those acts only of the Government which he really approved, though he could not afford to denounce those from which he differed. Undoubtedly, as many respectable moralists have told us, the man who endeavours to draw such lines will get into difficulties and probably emerge with a character not a little soiled in the process. But after all as things go, it is something to find that a journalist has really a conscience, even though his conscience be a little too open to solid arguments. He was still capable of blushing. Let us be thankful that in these days our journalists are too high-minded to be ever required to blush. Here, however, I have only to speak of the effect of De Foe's position upon his fictions. He had early begun to try other than political modes of journalism. His account of the great storm of 1703 was one of his first attempts as a reporter; and it is characteristic that, as he was in prison at the time, he had already to report things seen only by the eye of faith. He tried at an early period to give variety to his *Review* by some of the "social" articles which afterwards became the staple of the *Tatler* and *Spectator*. When, after the death of Queen Anne, there was a political lull he struck out new paths. It was then that he wrote lives of

highwaymen and dissenting divines, and that he patched up any narratives which he could get hold of, and gave them the shape of authentic historical documents. He discovered the great art of interviewing, and one of his performances might still pass for a masterpiece. Jack Sheppard, when already in the cart beneath the gallows, gave a paper to a bystander, of which the life published by De Foe on the following day professed to be a reproduction. Nothing that could be turned into copy for the newspaper or the sixpenny pamphlet of the day came amiss to this forerunner of journalistic enterprise. This is the true explanation of *Robinson Crusoe* and its successors. *Robinson Crusoe*, in fact, is simply an application on a larger scale of the device which he was practising every day. It is purely and simply a masterly bit of journalism. It affects to be a true story, as, of course, every story in a newspaper affects to be true; though De Foe had made not the very remote discovery that it is often easier to invent the facts than to investigate them. He is simply a reporter *minus* the veracity. Like any other reporter, he assumes that the interest of his story depends obviously and entirely upon its verisimilitude. He relates the adventures of the genuine Alexander Selkirk, only elaborated into more detail,

just as a modern reporter might give us an account of Mr. Stanley's African expedition if Mr. Stanley had been unable to do so for himself. He is always in the attitude of mind of the newspaper correspondent, who has been interviewing the hero of an interesting story and ventures at most a little safe embroidery. This explains a remark made by Dickens, who complained that the account of Friday's death showed an "utter want of tenderness and sentiment," and says somewhere that *Robinson Crusoe* is the only great novel which never moves either to laughter or to tears. The creator of Oliver Twist and Little Nell was naturally scandalised by De Foe's dry and matter-of-fact narrative. But De Foe had never approached the conception of his art which afterwards became familiar. He had nothing to do with sentiment or psychology; those elements of interest came in with Richardson and Fielding; he was simply telling a true story and leaving his readers to feel what they pleased. It never even occurred to him, more than it occurs to the ordinary reporter, to analyse character or describe scenery or work up sentiment. He was simply a narrator of plain facts. He left poetry and reflection to Mr. Pope or Mr. Addison, as your straightforward annalist in a newspaper has no thought of rivalling Lord Tennyson or Mr.

Froude. His narratives were fictitious only in the sense that the facts did not happen; but that trifling circumstance was to make no difference to the mode of writing them. The poetical element would have been as much out of place as it would have been in a merchant's ledger. He could not, indeed, help introducing a little moralising, for he was a typical English middle-class dissenter. Some of his simple-minded commentators have even given him credit, upon the strength of such passages, for lofty moral purpose. They fancy that his lives of criminals, real or imaginary, were intended to be tracts showing that vice leads to the gallows. No doubt, De Foe had the same kind of solid homespun morality as Hogarth, for example, which was not in its way a bad thing. But one need not be very cynical to believe that his real object in writing such books was to produce something that would sell, and that in the main he was neither more nor less moral than the last newspaper writer who has told us the story of a sensational murder.

De Foe, therefore, may be said to have stumbled almost unconsciously into novel-writing. He was merely aiming at true stories, which happened not to be true. But accidentally, or rather unconsciously, he could not help presenting us with a type of curious interest; for he necessarily

described himself and the readers whose tastes he understood and shared so thoroughly. His statement that *Robinson Crusoe* was a kind of allegory was truer than he knew. In *Robinson Crusoe* is De Foe, and more than De Foe, for he is the typical Englishman of his time. He is the broad-shouldered, beef-eating John Bull, who has been shouldering his way through the world ever since. Drop him in a desert island, and he is just as sturdy and self-composed as if he were in Cheapside. Instead of shrieking or writing poetry, becoming a wild hunter or a religious hermit, he calmly sets about building a house and making pottery and laying out a farm. He does not accommodate himself to his surroundings; they have got to accommodate themselves to him. He meets a savage and at once annexes him, and preaches him such a sermon as he had heard from the exemplary Dr. Doddridge. Cannibals come to make a meal of him, and he calmly stamps them out with the means provided by civilisation. Long years of solitude produce no sort of effect upon him morally or mentally. He comes home as he went out, a solid keen tradesman, having, somehow or other, plenty of money in his pocket and ready to undertake similar risks in the hope of making a little more. He has taken his own atmosphere with him to the remotest quarters.

Wherever he has set down his solid foot, he has taken permanent possession of the country. The ancient religions of the primæval East or the quaint beliefs of savage tribes make no particular impression upon him, except a passing spasm of disgust at anybody having different superstitions from his own; and, being in the main a good-natured animal in a stolid way of his own, he is able to make use even of popish priests if they will help to found a new market for his commerce. The portrait is not the less effective because the artist was so far from intending it that he could not even conceive of anybody being differently constituted from himself. It shows us all the more vividly what was the manner of man represented by the stalwart Englishman of the day; what were the men who were building up vast systems of commerce and manufacture; shoving their intrusive persons into every quarter of the globe; evolving a great empire out of a few factories in the East; winning the American continent for the dominant English race; sweeping up Australia by the way as a convenient settlement for convicts; stamping firmly and decisively on all toes that got in their way; blundering enormously and preposterously, and yet always coming out steadily planted on their feet; eating roast beef and plum-pudding; drinking rum in

the tropics; singing *God Save the King* and intoning Watts's hymns under the nose of ancient dynasties and prehistoric priesthoods; managing always to get their own way, to force a reluctant world to take note of them as a great if rather disagreeable fact, and making it probable that, in long ages to come, the English of *Robinson Crusoe* will be the native language of inhabitants of every region under the sun.

# Richardson's Novels

The literary artifice, so often patronised by Lord Macaulay, of describing a character by a series of paradoxes, is of course, in one sense, a mere artifice. It is easy enough to make a dark grey black and a light grey white, and to bring the two into unnatural proximity. But it rests also upon the principle which is more of a platitude than a paradox, that our chief faults often lie close to our chief merits. The greatest man is perhaps one who is so equably developed that he has the strongest faculties in the most perfect equilibrium, and is apt to be somewhat uninteresting to the rest of mankind. The man of lower eminence has some one or more faculties developed out of all proportion to the rest, with the natural result of occasionally overbalancing him. Extraordinary memories with weak logical faculties, wonderful imaginative sensibility with a complete absence of self-control, and other defective conformations of mind, supply the raw materials for a luminary of the second order, and imply

a predisposition to certain faults, which are natural complements to the conspicuous merits.

Such reflections naturally occur in speaking of one of our greatest literary reputations, whose popularity is almost in an inverse ratio to his celebrity. Every one knows the names of Sir Charles Grandison and Clarissa Harlowe. They are amongst the established types which serve to point a paragraph; but the volumes in which they are described remain for the most part in undisturbed repose, sleeping peacefully amongst Charles Lamb's *biblia a-biblia*, books which are no books, or, as he explains, those books "which no gentleman's library should be without." They never enjoy the honours of cheap reprints; the modern reader shudders at a novel in eight volumes, and declines to dig for amusement in so profound a mine; when some bold inquirer dips into their pages he generally fancies that the sleep of years has been somehow absorbed into the paper; a certain soporific aroma exhales from the endless files of fictitious correspondence. This contrast, however, between popularity and celebrity is not so rare as to deserve special notice. Richardson's slumber may be deeper than that of most men of equal fame, but it is not quite unprecedented. The string of paradoxes, which it would be easy to apply to Richardson, would turn

upon a different point. The odd thing is, not that so many people should have forgotten him, but that he should have been remembered by people at first sight so unlike him. Here is a man we might say, whose special characteristic it was to be a milksop—who provoked Fielding to a coarse, hearty burst of ridicule—who was steeped in the incense of useless adulation from a throng of middle-aged lady worshippers—who wrote his novels expressly to recommend little unimpeachable moral maxims, as that evil courses lead to unhappy deaths, that ladies ought to observe the laws of propriety, and generally that it is an excellent thing to be thoroughly respectable; who lived an obscure life in a petty coterie in fourth-rate London society, and was in no respect at a point of view more exalted than that of his companions. What greater contrast can be imagined in its way than that between Richardson, with his second-rate eighteenth-century priggishness and his two-penny-tract morality, and the modern school of French novelists, who are certainly not prigs, and whose morality is by no means that of tracts? We might have expected *à priori* that they would have summarily put him down, as a hopeless Philistine. Yet Richardson was idolised by some of their best writers; Balzac, for example, and George Sand, speak of him with reverence; and

a writer who is, perhaps, as odd a contrast to Richardson as could well be imagined—Alfred de Musset—calls *Clarissa le premier roman du monde.* What is the secret which enables the steady old printer, with his singular limitation to his own career of time and space, to impose upon the Byronic Parisian of the next century? Amongst his contemporaries Diderot expresses an almost fanatical admiration of Richardson for his purity and power, and declares characteristically that he will place Richardson's works on the same shelf with those of Moses, Homer, Euripides, and other favourite writers; he even goes so far as to excuse Clarissa's belief in Christianity on the ground of her youthful innocence. To continue in the paradoxical vein, we might ask how the quiet tradesman could create the character which has stood ever since for a type of the fine gentleman of the period; or how from the most prosaic of centuries should spring one of the most poetical of feminine ideals? We can hardly fancy a genuine hero with a pigtail, or a heroine in a hoop and high-heeled shoes, nor believe that persons who wore those articles of costume could possess any very exalted virtues. Perhaps our grandchildren may have the same difficulty about the race which wears crinolines and chimney-pot hats.

It is a fact, however, that our grandfathers, in

spite of their belief in pigtails, and in Pope's poetry, and other matters that have gone out of fashion, had some very excellent qualities, and even some genuine sentiment, in their compositions. Indeed, now that their peculiarities have been finally packed away in various lumber-rooms, and the revolt against the old-fashioned school of thought and manners has become triumphant instead of militant, we are beginning to see the picturesque side of their character. They have gathered something of the halo that comes with the lapse of years; and social habits that looked prosaic enough to contemporaries, and to the generation which had to fight against them, have gained a touch of romance. Richardson's characters wear a costume and speak a language which are indeed queer and old-fashioned, but are now far enough removed from the present to have a certain piquancy; and it is becoming easier to recognise the real genius which created them, as the active aversion to the forms in which it was necessarily clothed tends to disappear. The wigs and the high-heeled shoes are not without a certain pleasing quaintness; and when we have surmounted this cause of disgust, we can see more plainly what was the real power which men of the most opposite schools in art have recognised. Readers whose appetite for ancient fiction is in-

sufficient to impel them to a perusal of *Clarissa* may yet find some amusement in turning over the curious collection of letters published with a life by Mrs. Barbauld in 1804. Nowhere can we find a more vivid picture of the social stratum to which Richardson belonged. We take a seat in the old gentleman's shop, or drop in to take a dish of tea with him at North End, in Hammersmith. We learn to know them almost as well as we know the literary circle of the next generation from Boswell or the higher social sphere from Horace Walpole—and it is a pleasant relief, after reading the solemn histories which recall the struggles of Walpole and Chesterfield and their like, to drop in upon this quiet little coterie of homely commonplace people leading calm domestic lives and amusingly unconscious of the political and intellectual storms which were raging outside. Richardson himself was the typical industrious apprentice. He was the son of a London tradesman who had witnessed with due horror the Popish machinations of James II. Richardson, born just after the Revolution, had been apprenticed to a printer, married his master's daughter, set up a fairly successful business, was master of the Stationer's Company in 1754, and was prosperous enough to have his country box, first at North End and afterwards at Parson's

Green. He never learned any language but his own. He had taken to writing from his infancy; he composed little stories of an edifying tendency and had written love-letters for young women of his acquaintance. From his experience in these departments he acquired the skill which was afterwards displayed in *Pamela* and his two later and superior novels. We hear dimly of many domestic trials: of the loss of children, some of whom had lived to be "delightful prattlers," of "eleven affecting deaths in two years." Who were the eleven remains unknown. His sorrows have long passed into oblivion, unless so far as the sentiment was transmuted into his writings. We do not know whether it was from calamity or constitutional infirmity that he became a very nervous and tremulous little man. He never dared to ride, but exercised himself on a "chamber-horse," one of which apparently wooden animals he kept at each of his houses. For years he could not raise a glass to his lips without help. His dread of altercations prevented him from going often among his workmen. He gave his orders in writing that he might not have to bawl to a deaf foreman. He gave up "wine and flesh and fish." He drew a capital portrait of himself, for the benefit of a lady still unknown to him, who recognised him by its help at a distance of "about

three hundred yards." His description is minute enough:

Short; rather plump than emaciated, notwithstanding his complaints; about 5 foot 5 inches; fair wig, lightish cloth coat, all black besides; one hand generally in his bosom, the other, a cane in it, which he leans upon under the skirts of his coat usually, that it may imperceptibly serve him as a support when attacked by sudden tremors or startings and dizziness, which too frequently attack him, but, thank God, not so often as formerly; looking directly foreright, as passers by would imagine, but observing all that stirs on either hand of him without moving his short neck; hardly ever turning back; of a light brown complexion; teeth not yet failing him; smoothish-faced and ruddy cheeked; at some times looking to be about sixty-five, at others much younger [really sixty]; a regular even pace stealing away ground rather than seeming to rid it; a grey eye, too often overclouded by mistinesses from the head; by chance lively—very lively it will be if he have hopes of seeing a lady whom he loves and honours; his eye always on the ladies; if they have very large hoops he looks down and supercilious and as if he would be thought wise, but perhaps the sillier for that; as he approaches a lady his eye is never fixed first upon her face, but upon her feet and thence he raises it up pretty quickly for a dull eye; and one would think (if we thought him at all worthy of observation) that from her air and the last beheld (her face) he sets her down in his mind as *so* and *so*, and then passes on to the next object he meets; only then looking back, if he greatly likes or dislikes, as if he would see if the lady appear to be all of a piece in the one light or the other.

After this admirable likeness we can appreciate better the two coloured engravings in the letters. Richardson looks like a plump white mouse in a wig, at once vivacious and timid. We see him in one picture toddling along the Pantiles at Tunbridge Wells, in the neighbourhood of the great Mr. Pitt and Speaker Onslow and the bigamous Duchess of Kingston and Colley Cibber and the cracked and shrivelled-up Whiston and a (perhaps not the famous) Mr. Johnson in company with a bishop. In the other, he is sitting in his parlour with its stiff, old-fashioned furniture and a glimpse into the garden, reading *Sir Charles Grandison* to the admirable Miss Mulso, afterwards Mrs. Chapone, and a small party, inclusive of the artist, Miss Highmore, to whom we owe sincere gratitude for this peep into the past. Richardson sits in his "usual morning dress," a kind of brown dressing-gown with a skull cap on his head, filling the chair with his plump little body, and raising one foot (or has the artist found difficulties in planting both upon the ground?) to point his moral with an emphatic stamp.

Many eminent men of his time were polite to Richardson after he had won fame at the mature age of fifty. He was not the man to presume on his position. He was "very shy of obtruding

himself on persons of condition." He never rose like Pope, whose origin was not very dissimilar, to speak to princes and ministers as an equal. He was always the obsequious and respectful shopkeeper. The great Warburton wrote a letter to his "good sir"—a phrase equivalent to the two fingers of a dignified greeting—suggesting, in Pope's name and his own, a plan for continuing *Pamela*. She was to be the ingenuous young person shocked at the conventionalities of good society. Richardson sensibly declined a plan for which he was unfitted; and in 1747 Warburton condescended to write a preface to *Clarissa Harlowe*, pointing out (very superfluously!) the nature of the intended moral. Warburton afterwards took offence at a passage in the same book which he took to glance at Pope; and Richardson was on friendly terms with two authors, Edwards of the *Canons of Criticism*, and Aaron Hill, who were among the multitudinous enemies of Warburton and his patron Pope. Hill's letters in the correspondence are worth reading as illustrations of the old moral of literary vanity. He expresses with unusual *naïveté* the doctrine, so pleasant to the unsuccessful, that success means the reverse of merit. Pope's fame was due to personal assiduities, and "a certain bladdery swell of management." It is already passing away. He does not

speak from jealousy, for nobody ever courted fame "with less solicitude than I." But for all that, there will come a time! He knows it on a surer ground than vanity. Let us hope that this little salve to self-esteem never lost its efficacy. Surely of all prayers the most injudicious was that of Burns, that we might see ourselves as others see us. What would become of us? Richardson, as we might expect, was highly esteemed by Young of the *Night Thoughts*, and by Johnson, to both of whom he seems to have given substantial proofs of friendship. He wrote the only number of the *Rambler* which had a good sale, and helped Johnson when under arrest for debt; Johnson repaid him by the phrase, which long passed for the orthodox decision, that Richardson taught the passions to move at the command of virtue. But the most delightful of Richardson's friends was the irrepressible Colley Cibber. Mrs. Pilkington, a disreputable adventuress, faintly remembered by her relations to Swift, describes Cibber's reception of the unpublished *Clarissa:*

> The dear gentleman did almost rave. When I told him that she (Clarissa) must die, he said G—— d—— him if she should, and that he should no longer believe Providence or eternal wisdom or goodness governed the world if merit and innocence and beauty were to be so destroyed. "Nay," added he, "my mind is so hurt with the thought of her being violated,

that were I to see her in heaven, sitting on the knees of the blessed Virgin and crowned with glory, her sufferings would still make me feel horror, horror distilled." These were his strongly emphatical impressions.

Cibber's own letters are as lively as Mrs. Pilkington's report of his talk:

The delicious meal I made off Miss Byron on Sunday last [he says] has given me an appetite for another slice of her, off from the spit, before she is served up to the public table; if about five o'clock to-morrow afternoon be not inconvenient, Mrs. Brown and I will come and nibble upon a bit more of her! And we have grace after meat as well as before.

"The devil take the insolent goodness of your imagination!" exclaims the lively old buck, now past eighty, and as well preserved as if he had never encountered Pope's "scathing satire" (does satire ever "scathe"?) or Fielding's rough horseplay. One of Richardson's lady admirers saw Cibber flirting with fine ladies at Tunbridge Wells in 1754 (he was born in 1671), and miserable when he was neglected for a moment by the greatest *belle* in the society. He professed to be only seventy-seven!

Perhaps even Cibber was beaten in flattery by the "minister of the gospel" who thought that if some of Clarissa's letters had been found in the Bible they would have been regarded as manifest

proofs of divine inspiration. But the more delightful incense came from the circle of admiring young ladies who called him their dear papa; who passed long days at his feet at Parson's Green; allowed him to escape to his summer-house to add a letter to the growing volumes, and after an early dinner persuaded him to read it aloud. Their eager discussions as to the fate of the characters and the little points of morality which arose are continued in his gossiping letters. When a child he had been the confidant of tender-hearted maidens, and now he became a kind of spiritual director. He was, as Miss Collier said, the "only champion and protector" of her sex. Women, and surely they must be good judges, thought that he understood the feminine heart, as their descendants afterwards attributed the same power to Balzac. The most attractive of his feminine correspondents was Mrs. Klopstock, wife of the "German Milton," who tells her only little love story with charming simplicity, and thus lays her homage at the feet of Richardson:

Honoured sir, will you permit me to take this opportunity, in sending a letter to Dr. Young, to address myself to you? It is very long that I wished to do it. Having finished your *Clarissa* (oh, the heavenly book!) I would have prayed you to write the history of a *manly* Clarissa but I had not courage

enough at that time. I should have it no more to-day, as this is only my first English letter; but I have it! It may be because I am now Klopstock's wife (I believe you know my husband by Mr. Hohorst), and then I was only the single young girl. You have since written the manly Clarissa without my prayer; oh, you have done it to the great joy and thanks of all your happy readers! Now you can write no more, you must write the history of an angel!

Mrs. Klopstock died young; having had the happiness to find that Richardson did not resent her intrusion, great author as he was. Another correspondent, Lady Bradshaigh, wife of a Lancashire country gentleman, took precautions which show what a halo then surrounded the author in the eyes of his countrywomen. It was worth while to be an author then! Lady Bradshaigh was a good housewife, it seems, but, having no children, was able to devote some time to reading. She obtained a portrait of Richardson, but altered the name to Dickenson, in order that no one might suspect her of corresponding with an author. After reading the first four volumes of *Clarissa* (which were separately published) she wrote under a feigned name to beg the author to alter the impending catastrophe. She spoke as the mouthpiece of a "multitude of admirers" who desired to see Lovelace reformed and married to Clarissa. "Sure you will think it worth your

while, sir, to save his soul!" she exclaims. Richardson was too good an artist to spoil his tragedy; and was rewarded by an account of her emotions on reading the last volumes. She laid the book down in agonies, took it up again, shed a flood of tears, and threw herself upon her couch to compose her mind. Her husband who was plodding after her, begged her to read no more. But she had promised Richardson to finish the book. She nerved herself for the task; her sleep was broken, she woke in tears during the night, and burst into tears at her meals. Charmed by her delicious sufferings, she became Richardson's friend for life, though it was long before she could muster up courage to meet him face to face.

Yet Lady Bradshaigh seems to have been a sensible woman, and shows vivacity and intelligence in some of her discussions with Richardson. If he was not altogether spoilt by the flattery of so many excellent women, we can only explain it by remembering that he did not become famous till he was past fifty, and therefore past spoiling. One peculiarity, indeed, is rather unpleasant in these letters. Richardson's worshippers evidently felt that their deity was jealous, and made no scruple of offering the base sacrifice of abuse of rival celebrities. Richardson adopts their tone; he is always gibing at Fielding:

*I could not help telling his sister* [he observes—a sister, too, whose merits Fielding had praised with his usual generosity]—that I was equally surprised at and concerned for his continuous lowness. Had your brother, said I, been born in a stable or been a runner at a sponging-house we should have thought him a genius,

but now! So another great writer came just in time to be judged by Richardson. A bishop asked him, "Who is this Yorick," who has, it seems, been countenanced by an "ingenious dutchess." Richardson briefly replies that the bishop cannot have looked into the books, "execrable I cannot but call them." Their only merit is that they are "too gross to be inflaming." The history of the mutual judgments upon each other of contemporary authors would be more amusing than edifying.

Richardson should not have been so hard upon Sterne, for Sterne was in some degree following Richardson's lead.

What is the meaning [asks Lady Bradshaigh (about 1749)] of the word *sentimental*, so much in vogue among the polite both in town and country? Everything clever and agreeable is comprehended in that word; but I am convinced a wrong interpretation is given, because it is impossible everything clever and agreeable can be so common as that word.

She has heard of a sentimental man; a sentimental party, and a sentimental walk; and has

been applauded for calling a letter sentimental. I hope that the philological dictionary may tell us what was the first appearance of a word which, in this sense, marks an epoch in literature, and, indeed, in much else. I find the word used in the old sense in 1752 in a pamphlet upon "*sentimental* differences in point of faith," that is, differences of sentiment or opinion. When, a few years later, Sterne published his *Sentimental Journey*, Wesley asks in his journal what is the meaning of the new phrase, and observes (the illustration has lost its point) that you might as well say *continental*. The appearance of the phrase coincides with the appearance of the thing; for Richardson was the first sentimentalist. We may trace the same movement elsewhere, though we need not here speculate upon the cause. Pope's *Essay on Man* is the expression in verse of the dominant theology of the Deists and their opponents, which was beginning to be condemned as dry and frigid. A desire for something more "sentimental" shows itself in Young's *Night Thoughts*, in Hervey's *Meditations*, and appears in the religious domain as Methodism. The literary historian has to trace the rise of the same tendency in various places. In Germany, as we see from Mrs. Klopstock's enthusiasm, the flame was only waiting for the spark. Goethe, in his *Wahrheit und Dichtung*,

notices the influence of Richardson's novels in Germany. They were among the predisposing causes of Wertherism. In France, as I have said, Richardson found congenial hearers, and Clarissa's soul doubtless transmigrated into the heroine of the *Nouvelle Héloïse*. Even in stubborn England, where Fielding's masculine contempt for the whinings of *Pamela* was more congenial, the students of Richardson were prepared to receive *Ossian* with enthusiasm, and to be ecstatic over *Tristram Shandy*. That Richardson would have agreed with Johnson in regarding Rousseau as fit only for a penal settlement, and that he actually considered Sterne to be "execrable," does not relieve him of the responsibility or deprive him of the glory. He is not the only writer who has helped to evoke a spirit which he would be the last to sanction. When he encouraged his admirably proper young ladies to indulge in "sentimentalism," he could not tell where so vague an impulse would ultimately land them. He was a sound Tory, and an accepter of all established creeds. Sentimentalism with him was merely a delight in cultivating the emotions without any thought of consequences; or, later, of cultivating them with the assumption that they would continue to move, as he bade them, "at the command of virtue." Once set in motion, they chose to

take paths of their own; they revolted against conventions, even those which he held most sacred; and by degrees set up "Nature" as an idol, and admired the ingenuous savage instead of the respectable Clarissa, and denounced all corruption, including, alas, the British constitution, and even the Thrity-nine Articles, and put themselves at the disposal of all manner of revolutionary audacities. But the little printer was safe in his grave, and knew not of what strange developments he had been the ignorant accomplice.

To return, however, it must be granted that Richardson's sympathy with women gives a remarkable power to his works. Nothing is more rare than to find a great novelist who can satisfactorily describe the opposite sex. Women's heroes are women in disguise, or mere lay-figures, walking gentlemen who parade tolerably through their parts, but have no real vitality. On the other hand, the heroines of male writers are for the most part unnaturally strained or quite colourless; male hands are too heavy for the delicate work required. Milton could draw a majestic Satan, but his Eve is no better than a good-managing housekeeper who knows her place. It is, therefore, remarkable that Richardson's greatest triumph should be in describing a woman, and that most of his feminine characters are more life-

like and more delicately discriminated than his men. Unluckily, his conspicuous faults result from the same cause. His moral prosings savour of the endless gossip over a dish of chocolate in which his heroines delight; we can imagine the applause with which his admiring feminine circle would receive his demonstration of the fact, that adversity is harder to bear than prosperity, or the sentiment that "a man of principle whose love is founded in reason, and whose object is mind rather than person, must make a worthy woman happy." These are admirable sentiments, but they savour of the serious tea-party. If *Tom Jones* has about it an occasional suspicion of beer and pipes at the bar, *Sir Charles Grandison* recalls an indefinite consumption of tea and small-talk. In short, the feminine part of Richardson's character has a little too much affinity to Mrs. Gamp—not that he would ever be guilty of putting gin in his cup, but that he would have the same capacity for spinning out indefinite twaddle of a superior kind. And, of course, he fell into the faults which beset the members of mutual admiration societies in general, but especially those which consist chiefly of women. Men who meet for purposes of mutual flattery become unnaturally solemn and priggish; they never free themselves from the suspicion that the older members of the coterie

may be laughing at them behind their backs. But the flattery of women is so much more delicate, and so much more sincere, that it is far more dangerous. It is a poultice which in time softens the hardest outside. Richardson yielded as entirely as any curate exposed to a shower of slippers. He evidently wrote under the impression that he was not merely an imaginative writer of the highest order, but also a great moralist. He was reforming the world, putting down vice, sending duelling out of fashion, and inculcating the lessons of the pulpit in a far more attractive form. A modern novelist is half-ashamed of his art; he disclaims earnestly any serious purpose; his highest aim is to amuse his readers and his greatest boast that he amuses them by honourable or at least by harmless means. There are, indeed, novelists who write to inculcate High-Church or Low-Church principles, or to prove that society at large is out of joint; but a direct intention to prove that men ought not to steal or get drunk, or commit any other atrocities, is generally considered to be beside the novelist's function, and its introduction to be a fault of art. Indeed, there is much to be said against it. In our youth we used to read a poem about a cruel little boy who went out to fish and was punished by somehow becoming suspended by his chin from

a hook in the larder. It never produced much effect upon us, because we felt that the accident was, to say the least, rather exceptional; at most, we fished on, and were careful about the larder. The same principle applies to the poetic justice distributed by most novelists. When Richardson kills off his villains by violent deaths, we know too well that many villains live to a good old age, leave handsome fortunes, and are buried under the handsomest of tombstones, with the most elegant of epitaphs. This very rough device for inculcating morality is of course ineffectual, and produces some artistic blemishes. The direct exhortations to his readers to be good are still more annoying; no human being can long endure a mixture of preaching and story-telling. For Heaven's sake, we exclaim, tell us what happens to Clarissa, and don't stop to prove that honesty is the best policy! In a wider sense, however, the seriousness of Richardson's purpose is of high value. He is so keenly in earnest, so profoundly interested about his characters, so determined to make us enter into their motives, that we cannot help being carried away; if he never spares an opportunity of giving us a lecture, at least his zeal in setting forth an example never flags for an instant. The effort to give us an ideally perfect character seems to stimulate his imagination, and

leads to a certain intensity of realisation which we are apt to miss in the purposeless school of novelists. He is always, as it were, writing at high-pressure and under a sense of responsibility.

The method which he adopts lends itself very conveniently to heighten this effect. Richardson's feminine delight in letter-writing was, as we have seen, the immediate cause of his plunge into authorship. Richardson's novels, indeed, are not so much novels put for convenience under the form of letters, as letters expanded till they become novels. A genuine novelist who should put his work into the unnatural shape of a correspondence would probably find it a very awkward expedient; but Richardson gradually worked up to the novel from the conception of a collection of letters; and his method, therefore, came spontaneously to him. He started from the plan of writing letters to illustrate a certain point of morality, and to make them more effective attributed them to a fictitious character. The result was the gigantic tract called *Pamela*—distinctly the worst of his works—of which it is enough to say at present that it succeeds neither in being moral nor in amusing. It shows, however, a truly amazing fertility in a specially feminine art. We have all suffered from the propensity of some female minds (the causes of which we will not

attempt to analyse) for pouring forth indefinite floods of correspondence. We know the heartless fashion in which some ladies, even in these days of penny-postage, will fill a sheet of note-paper and proceed to cross their writing till the page becomes a chequer-work of unintelligible hieroglyphics. But we may feel gratitude in looking back to the days when time hung heavier, and letter-writing was a more serious business. The letters of those times may recall the fearful and wonderful labours of tapestry in which ladies employed their needles by way of killing time. The monuments of both kinds are a fearful indication of the *ennui* from which the perpetrators must have suffered. We pity those who endured the toil as we pity the prisoners whose patient ingenuity has carved a passage through a stone wall with a rusty nail. Richardson's heroines, and his heroes too, for that matter, would have been portents at any time. We will take an example at hazard. Miss Byron, on March 22, writes a letter of fourteen pages (in the old collective edition). The same day she follows it up by two of six and of twelve pages respectively. On the 23rd she leads off with a letter of eighteen pages, and another of ten. On the 24th she gives us two, filling together thirty pages, at the end of which she remarks that she is *forced* to lay down

her pen, and then adds a postscript of six more; on the 25th she confines herself to two pages; but after a Sunday's rest she makes another start of equal vigour. In three days, therefore, she covers ninety-six pages. Two of the pages are about equal to four in this volume. Consequently, in three days' correspondence, referring to the events of the day, she would fill something like a hundred and ninety-two of these pages—a task the magnitude of which may be appreciated by any one who will try the experiment. We should say that she must have written for nearly eight hours a day, and are not surprised at her remark, that she has on one occasion only managed two hours' sleep.

It would, of course, be the height of pedantry to dwell upon this, as though a fictitious personage were to be in all respects bounded by the narrow limits of human capacity. It is not the object of a really good novelist, nor does it come within the legitimate means of high art in any department to produce an actual illusion. Showmen in some foreign palaces call upon us to admire paintings which we cannot distinguish from bas-reliefs; the deception is, of course, a mere trick, and the paintings are simply childish. On the stage we do not require to believe that the scenery is really what it imitates, and the attempt to introduce scraps of real life is a clear proof of a

low artistic aim. Similarly a novelist is not only justified in writing so as to prove that his work is fictitious, but he almost necessarily hampers himself, to the prejudice of his work, if he imposes upon himself the condition that his book shall be capable of being mistaken for a genuine narrative. Every good novelist lets us into secrets about the private thoughts of his characters which it would be impossible to obtain in real life. We do not, therefore, blame Richardson because his characters have a power of writing which no mortal could ever attain. His fault, indeed, is exactly the contrary. He very erroneously fancies that he is bound to convince us of the possibility of all his machinery, and often produces the very shock to our belief which he seeks to avoid. He is constantly trying to account by elaborate devices for the fertile correspondence of his characters, when it is perfectly plain that they are simply writing a novel. We should never have asked a question as to the authenticity of the letters, if he did not force the question upon us; and no art can induce us for a moment to accept the proffered illusion. For example, Miss Byron gives us a long account of conversations between persons whom she did not know, which took place ten years before. It is much better that the impossibility should be frankly accepted, on the clear ground that au-

thors of novels, and consequently their creatures, have the prerogative of omniscience. At least, the slightest account of the way in which she came by the knowledge would be enough to satisfy us for all purposes of fiction. Richardson is not content with this, and elaborately demonstrates that she might have known a number of minute details which it is perfectly plain that a real Miss Byron could never have known, and thus dashes into our faces an improbability which we should have been quite content to pass unnoticed.

The method, however, of telling the story by the correspondence of the actors produces more important effects. The hundred and ninety-two pages in question are all devoted to the proceedings of three days. They are filled, for the most part, with interminable conversations. The story advances by a very few steps; but we know all that every one of the persons concerned has to say about the matter. We discover what was Sir Charles Grandison's relation at a particular time to a certain Italian lady, Clementina. We are told exactly what view he took of his own position; what view Clementina took of it; what Miss Byron had to say to Sir Charles on the subject, and what advice her relations bestowed upon Miss Byron. Then we have all the sentiments of Sir Charles Grandison's sisters, and of his brothers-

in-law, and of his reverend old tutor; and the sentiments of all the Lady Clementina's family, and the incidental remarks of a number of subordinate actors. In short, we see the characters all round in all their relations to each other, in every possible variation and permutation; we are present at all the discussions which take place before every step, and watch the gradual variation of all the phases of the positions. We get the same sort of elaborate familiarity with every aspect of affairs that we should receive from reading a blue-book full of some prolix diplomatic correspondence; indeed, *Sir Charles Grandison* closely resembles such a blue-book, for the plot is carried on mainly by elaborate negotiations between three different families, with proposals, and counter proposals, and amended proposals, and a final settlement of the very complicated business by a deliberate signing of two different sets of articles. One of them, we need hardly say, is a marriage settlement; the other is a definite treaty between the lady who is not married and her family, the discussion of which occupies many pages. The extent to which we are drawn into the minutest details may be inferred from the fact that nearly a volume is given to marrying Sir Charles Grandison to Miss Byron, after all difficulties have been surmounted. We have at full length all the

discussions by which the day is fixed, and all the remarks of the unfortunate lovers of both parties, and all the criticisms of both families, and finally an elaborate account of the ceremony, with the names of the persons who went in the separate coaches, the dresses of the bride and bridesmaids, and the sums which Sir Charles gave away to the village girls who strewed flowers on the pathway. Surely the feminine element in Richardson's character was a little in excess.

The result of all this is a sort of Dutch painting of extraordinary minuteness. The art reminds us of the patient labour of a line-engraver, who works for days at making out one little bit of minute stippling and cross-hatching. The characters are displayed to us step by step and line by line. We are gradually forced into familiarity with them by a process resembling that by which we learn to know people in real life. We are treated to few set analyses or summary descriptions, but by constantly reading their letters and listening to their talk we gradually form an opinion of the actors. We see them, too, all round; instead of, as is usual in modern novels, regarding them steadily from one point of view; we know what each person thinks of every one else, and what every one else thinks of him; they are brought into a stereoscopic distinctness by com-

bining the different aspects of their character. Of course, a method of this kind involves much labour on the part both of writer and reader. It is evident that Richardson did not think of amusing a stray half-hour in a railway-carriage or in a club smoking-room; he counted upon readers who would apply themselves seriously to a task, in the hope of improving their morals as much as of gaining some harmless amusement. This theory is explicitly set forth in Warburton's preface to *Clarissa*. But it must also be said that, considering the cumbrous nature of the process, the spirit with which it is applied is wonderful. Richardson's own interest in his actors never flags. The distinct style of every correspondent is faithfully preserved with singular vivacity. When we have read a few letters we are never at a loss to tell, from the style alone of any short passage, who is the imaginary author. Consequently, readers who can bear to have their amusement diluted, who are content with an imperceptibly slow development of plot, and can watch without impatience the approach of a foreseen incident through a couple of volumes, may find the prolixity less intolerable than might be expected. If they will be content to skip when they are bored, even less patient students may be entertained with a series of pictures of character and manners

skilfully contrasted and brilliantly coloured, though with a limited allowance of incident. Within his own sphere, no writer exceeds him in clearness and delicacy of conception.

In another way, the machinery of a fictitious correspondence is rather troublesome. As the author never appears in his own person, he is often obliged to trust his characters with trumpeting their own virtues. Sir Charles Grandison has to tell us himself of his own virtuous deeds; how he disarms ruffians who attack him in overwhelming numbers, and converts evil-doers by impressive advice; and, still more awkwardly, he has to repeat the amazing compliments which everybody is always paying him. Richardson does his best to evade the necessity; he couples all his virtuous heroes with friendly confidants, who relieve the virtuous heroes of the tiresome task of self-adulation; he supplies the heroes themselves with elaborate reasons for overcoming their modesty, and makes them apologise profusely for the unwelcome task. Still, ingenious as his expedients may be, and willing as we are to make allowance for the necessities of his task, we cannot quite free ourselves from an unpleasant suspicion as to the simplicity of his characters. *Clarissa* is comparatively free from this fault, though Clarissa takes a questionable pleasure in uttering the finest

sentiments and posing herself as a model of virtue. But in *Sir Charles Grandison* the fulsome interchange of flattery becomes offensive even in fiction. The virtuous characters give and receive an amount of eulogy enough to turn the strongest stomachs. How amiable is A! says B; how virtuous is C, and how marvellously witty is D! And then A, C, and D go through the same performance, adding a proper compliment to B in place of the exclamation appropriate to themselves. The only parallel in modern times is to be found at some of the public dinners, where every man proposes his neighbour's health with a tacit understanding that he is himself to furnish the text for a similar oration. But then at dinners people have the excuse of a state of modified sobriety.

This fault is, as we have said, aggravated by the epistolary method. That method makes it necessary that each person should display his or her own virtues, as in an exhibition of gymnastics the performers walk round and show their muscles. But the fault lies a good deal deeper. Every writer, consciously or unconsciously, puts himself into his novels, and exhibits his own character even more distinctly than that of his heroes. And Richardson, the head of a little circle of conscientious admirers of each other's virtues, could

not but reproduce on a different scale the tone of his own society. The Grandisons, and the families of Miss Byron and Clementina, merely repeat a practice with which he was tolerably familiar at home; whilst his characters represent to some extent the idealised Richardson himself;—and this leads us to the most essential characteristic of his novels. The greatest woman in France, according to Napoleon's brutal remark, was the woman who had the most children. In a different sense, the saying may pass for truth. The greatest writer is the one who has produced the largest family of immortal children. Those of whom it can be said that they have really added a new type to the fictitious world are indeed few in number. Cervantes is in the front rank of all imaginative creators, because he has given birth to Don Quixote and Sancho Panza. Richardson's literary representatives are far indeed below these; but Richardson too may boast that, in his narrower sphere of thought, he has invented two characters that have still a strong vitality. They show all the weaknesses inseparable from the age and country of their origin. They are far inferior to the highest ideals of the great poets of the world; they are cramped and deformed by the conventionalities of their century and the narrow society in which they move and live. But for

all that they stir the emotions of a distant generation with power enough to show that their author must have pierced below the surface into the deeper and more perennial springs of human passion. These two characters are, of course, Clarissa and Sir Charles Grandison; and I may endeavour shortly to analyse the sources of their enduring interest.

Sir Charles Grandison has passed into a proverb. When Carlyle calls Lafayette a Grandison-Cromwell, he hits off one of those admirable nicknames which paint a character for us at once. Sir Charles Grandison is the model fine gentleman of the eighteenth century—the master of correct deportment, the unimpeachable representative of the old school. Richardson tells us with a certain *naïveté* that he has been accused of describing an impossible character; that Sir Charles is a man absolutely without a fault, or at least with faults visible only on a most microscopic observation. In fact, the only fault to which Sir Charles himself pleads guilty, in seven volumes, is that he once rather loses his temper. Two ruffians try to bully him in his own house, and even draw their swords upon him. Sir Charles so far forgets himself as to draw his own sword, disarm both of his opponents and turn them out of doors. He cannot forgive himself, he says, that he has been

"provoked by two such men to violate the sanctity of his own house." His only excuse is, "that there were two of them; and that tho' I drew, yet I had the command of myself so far as only to defend myself, when I might have done with them what I pleased." According to Richardson, this venial offence is the worst blot on Sir Charles's character. We certainly do not blame him for the attempt to draw an ideally perfect hero. It is a perfectly legitimate aim in fiction, and the only question can be whether he has succeeded: for Richardson's own commendation cannot be taken as quite sufficient, neither can we quite accept the ingenious artifice by which all the secondary characters perform as decoy-birds to attract our admiration. They do their very best to induce us to join in their hymns of praise. "Grandison," says a Roman Catholic bishop, "were he one of us, might expect canonisation." "How," exclaims his uncle, after a conversation with his paragon of a nephew, "how shall I bear my own littleness?" A party of reprobates about town have a long dispute with him, endeavouring to force him into a duel. At the end of it one of them exclaims admiringly, "Curse me, if I believe there is such another man in the world!" "I never saw a hero till now," says another. "I had rather have Sir C. Grandison for my friend

than the greatest prince on earth," says a third. "I had rather," replies his friend, "be Sir C. Grandison for this one past hour than the Great Mogul all my life." And the general conclusion is, "What poor toads are we!" "This man shows us," as a lady declares, "that goodness and greatness are synonymous words;" and when his sister marries, she complains that her brother "has long made all other men indifferent to her. Such an infinite difference!" In the evening, according to custom, she dances a minuet with her bridegroom, but whispers a friend that she would have performed better had she danced with her brother.

The structure, however, of the story itself is the best illustration of Sir Charles's admirable qualities. The plot is very simple. He rescues Miss Byron, from an attempt at a forcible abduction. Miss Byron, according to her friends, is the queen of her sex, and is amongst women what Sir Charles is amongst men. Of course, they straightway fall in love. Sir Charles, however, shows symptoms of a singular reserve, which is at last explained by the fact that he is already half-engaged to a noble Italian lady, Clementina. He has promised, in fact, to marry her if certain objections on the score of his country and religion can be surmounted. The interest lies chiefly in the varying inclinations of the balance, at one moment favourable to Miss

Byron, and at another to the "saint and angel" Clementina. When Miss Byron thinks that Sir Charles will be bound in honour to marry Clementina, she begins to pine;

> she visibly falls away; and her fine complexion fades; [her friends] watch in silent love every turn of her mild and patient eye, every change of her charming countenance; for they know too well to what to impute the malady which has approached the best of hearts; they know that the cure cannot be within the art of the physician.

When Clementina fears that the scruples of her relatives will separate her from Sir Charles, she takes the still more decided step of going mad; and some of her madness would be very touching, if it were not a trifle too much after the conventional pattern of the mad women in Sheridan's *Critic*. Whilst these two ladies are breaking their hearts about Sir Charles they do justice to each other's merits. Harriet will never be happy unless she knows that the admirable Clementina has reconciled herself to the loss of her adored; when Clementina finds herself finally separated from her lover, she sincerely implores Sir Charles to marry her more fortunate rival. Never was there such a display of fine feeling and utter absence of jealousy. Meanwhile a lovely ward of Sir Charles finds it necessary to her peace of mind

to be separated from her guardian; and another beautiful, but rather less admirable, Italian actually follows him to England to persuade him to accept her hand. Four ladies—all of them patterns of physical, moral, and intellectual excellence—are breaking their hearts; and though they are so excellent that they overcome their natural jealousy, they can scarcely look upon any other man after having known this model of all his sex. Indeed, every woman who approaches him falls desperately in love with him, unless she is his sister or old enough to be his grandmother. The plot of the novel depends upon an attraction for the fair sex which is apparently irresistible; and the men, if they are virtuous, rejoice to sit admiringly at his feet, and, if they are vicious, retire abashed from his presence, to entreat his good advice when they are upon their deathbeds.

All this is easy enough. A novelist can make his women fall in love with his hero as easily as, with a stroke of the pen, he can endow him with fifty thousand a year, or bestow upon him every virtue under heaven. Neither has he any difficulty in making him the finest dancer in England, or giving him such marvellous skill with the small-sword that he can avoid the sin of duelling by instantaneously disarming his most formidable opponents. The real question is, whether he can

animate this conglomerate of all conceivable virtues with a real human soul, set him before us as a living and breathing reality, and make us feel that, if we had known him, we too should have been ready to swell the full chorus of admiration. It is rather more difficult to convey the impression which a perusal of his correspondence and conversation leaves upon an unprejudiced mind. Does Sir Charles, when we come to know him intimately—for, with the ample materials provided, we really seem to know him—fairly support the amazing burden thrown upon him? Do we feel a certain disappointment when we meet the man whom all ladies love, and in whom every gentleman confesses a superior nature?

Two anecdotes about Sir Charles may suggest the answer. Voltaire, we know, ridiculed the proud English, who with the same scissors cut off the heads of their kings and the tails of their horses. To this last weakness Sir Charles was superior. His horses, says Miss Byron, "are not docked; their tails are only tied up when they are on the road." She would wish to find some fault with him, but as she forcibly says,

> if he be of opinion that the tails of these noble animals are not only a natural ornament, but of real use to defend them from the vexatious insects that in

summer are so apt to annoy them, how far from a dispraise is this humane consideration!

The other anecdote is of a different kind. When Sir Charles goes to church he does not, like some other gentlemen, bow low to the ladies of his acquaintance, and then to others of the gentry. No! "Sir Charles had first other devoirs to pay. He paid us his second compliments." From these two exemplary actions we must infer his whole character. It should have been inscribed on his tombstone, "He would not dock his horses' tails." That is, the most trifling details of his conduct are regulated on the most serious considerations. He is one of those solemn beings who can't shave themselves without implicitly asserting a great moral principle. He finds sermons in his horses' tails; he could give an excellent reason for the quantity of lace on his coat, which was due, it seems, to a sentiment of filial reverence; and he could not fix his hour for dinner without an eye to the reformation of society. In short, he was a prig of the first water; self-conscious to the last degree; and so crammed with little moral aphorisms that they drop out of his mouth whenever he opens his lips. And then his religion is in admirable keeping. It is intimately connected with the excellence of his deportment; and is, in fact,

merely the application of the laws of good society to the loftiest sphere of human duty. He pays his second compliments to his lady, and his first to the object of his adoration. He very properly gives the precedence to the being he professes to adore. As he carries his solemnity into the pettiest trifles of life, so he considers religious duties to be simply the most important part of social etiquette. He would shrink from blasphemy even more than from keeping on his hat in the presence of ladies; but the respect which he owes in one case is of the same order with that due in the other: it is only a degree more important.

We feel, indeed, a certain affection for Sir Charles Grandison. He is pompous and ceremonious to an insufferable degree; but there is really some truth in his sister's assertion, that his is the most delicate of human minds; through the cumbrous formalities of his century there shines a certain quickness and sensibility; he even condescends to be lively after a stately fashion, and to indulge in a little "raillying," only guarding himself rather too carefully against unbecoming levity. Indeed, though a man of the world at the present day would be as much astonished at his elaborate manners as at his laced coat and sword, he would admit that Sir Charles was by no means wanting in tact; his talk is weighted with more

elaborate formulæ than we care to employ, but it is good, vigorous conversation in the main, and, if rather overlaid with sermonising, can at times be really amusing. His religion is not of a very exalted character; he rises to no sublime heights of emotion, and would simply be puzzled by the fervours or the doubts of a more modern generation. In short, it seems to be compounded of common-sense and a regard for decorum—and those are not bad things in their way, though not the highest. He is not a very ardent reformer; he doubts whether the poor should be taught to read, and is very clear that every one should be made to know his station; but still he talks with sense and moderation, and even gets so far as to suggest the necessity of reformatories. He is not very romantic, and displays an amount of self-command in judicially settling the claims of the various ladies who are anxious to marry him, which is almost comic; he is perfectly ready to marry the Italian lady, if she can surmount her religious scruples, though he is in love with Miss Byron; and his mind is evidently in a pleasing state of equilibrium, so that he will be happy with either dear charmer. Indeed, for so chivalric a gentleman, his view of love and marriage is far less enthusiastic than we should now require. One of his benevolent actions, which throws all

his admirers into fits of eulogy, is to provide one of his uncles with a wife. The gentleman is a peer, but has hitherto been of disreputable life. The lady, though of good family and education, is above thirty, and her family have lost their estate. The match of convenience which Sir Charles patches up between them has obvious prudential recommendations; and of course it turns out admirably. But one is rather puzzled to know what special merit Sir Charles can claim for bringing it to pass.

Such a hero as this may be worthy and respectable, but is not a very exalted ideal. Neither do his circumstances increase our interest. It would be rather a curious subject of inquiry why it should be so impossible to make a virtuous hero interesting in fiction. In real life, men who do heroic actions are certainly more attractive than the villains. Domestic affection, patriotism, piety, and other good qualities are pleasant to contemplate in the world; why should they be so often an unspeakable bore in novels? Principally, no doubt, because our conception of a perfect man is apt to bring the negative qualities into too great prominence; we are asked to admire men because they have not passions—not because they overcome them. But there are further difficulties; for example, in a novel it is gen-

erally so easy to see what is wrong and what is right—the right-hand path branches off so decidedly from the left, that we give a man little credit for making the proper choice. Still more is it difficult to let us sufficiently into a man's interior to let us see the struggle and the self-sacrifice which ought to stir our sympathies. We witness the victories, but it is hard to make us feel the cost at which they are won. Now, Richardson has, as we shall directly remark, overcome this difficulty to a great extent in *Clarissa;* but in *Sir Charles Grandison* he has entirely shirked it; he has made everything too plain and easy for his hero. "I think I could be a good woman," says Becky Sharp, "if I had five thousand a year,"—and the history of Sir Charles Grandison might have suggested the remark. To be young, handsome, healthy, active, with a fine estate and a grand old house; to be able, by your eloquence, to send a sinner into a fit (as Sir Charles did once); to be the object of a devoted passion from three or four amiable, accomplished, and beautiful women—each of whom has a fine fortune, and only begs you to throw your handkerchief towards her, whilst she promises to bear no grudge if you throw it to her neighbour—all these are favourable conditions for virtue—especially if you mean the virtues of being hospitable, generous, a good

landlord and husband, and in every walk of life thoroughly gentlemanlike in your behaviour. But the whole design is rather too much in accordance with the device in enabling Sir Charles to avoid duels by having a marvellous trick of disarming his adversaries. "What on earth is the use of my fighting with you," says King Padella to Prince Giglio, "if you have got a fairy sword and a fairy horse?" And what merit is there in winning the battle of life, when you have every single circumstance in your favour? We are more attracted by Fielding's rather questionable hero, Captain Booth, though he does get into a sponging-house and is anything but a strict moralist, than by this prosperous young Sir Charles, rich with every gift the gods can give him, and of whom the most we can say is that the possession of all those gifts, if it has made him rather pompous and self-conscious, has not made him close-fisted or hard-hearted. Sir Charles, then, represents a rather carnal ideal; he suggests to us those well-fed, almost beefy and corpulent angels, whom the contemporary school of painters sometimes portray. No doubt they are angels, for they have wings and are seated in the clouds; but there is nothing ethereal in their whole nature. We have no love for asceticism; but a few hours on the column of St. Simon Stylites, or a

temporary diet of locusts and wild honey, might have purified Sir Charles's exuberant self-satisfaction. For all this, he is not without a certain solid merit, and the persons by whom he is surrounded—on whom we have not space to dwell—have a large share of the vivacity which amuses us in the real men and women of their time. Their talk may not be equal to that in Boswell's *Johnson;* but it is animated and amusing, and they compose a gallery of portraits which would look well in a solid red-brick mansion of the Georgian era.

We must, however, leave Sir Charles, to say a few words upon that which is Richardson's real masterpiece, and which, in spite of a full share of the defects apparent in *Grandison*, will always command the admiration of persons who have courage enough to get through eight volumes of correspondence. The characters of the little world in which the reader will pass his time are in some cases the same who reappear in *Grandison*. The lively Lady G. in the last is merely a new version of Miss Howe in the former. Clarissa herself is Miss Byron under altered circumstances, and receives from her friends the same shower of superlatives, whenever they have occasion to touch upon her merits. Richardson's ideal lady is not at first sight more prepossessing than his

gentleman. After Clarissa's death, her friend Miss Howe writes a glowing panegyric on her character. It will be enough to give the distribution of her time. To rest, it seems, she allotted six hours only. Her first three morning hours were devoted to study and to writing those terribly voluminous letters which, as one would have thought, must have consumed a still longer period. Two hours more were given to domestic management; for, as Miss Howe explains, "she was a perfect mistress of the four principal rules of arithmetic." Five hours were spent in music, drawing, and needlework, this last especially, and in conversation with the venerable parson of the parish. Two hours she devoted to breakfast and dinner; and as it was hard to restrict herself to this allowance, she occasionally gave one hour more to dinner-time conversation. One hour more was spent in visiting the neighbouring poor, and the remaining four hours to supper and conversation. These periods, it seems, were not fixed for every day; for she kept a kind of running account, and permitted herself to have an occasional holiday by drawing upon the reserved fund of the four hours for supper.

Setting aside the fearfully systematic nature of this arrangement—the stern determination to live by rule and system—it must be admitted that Miss

Harlowe was what in outworn phrase was called a very "superior" person. She would have made an excellent housekeeper, or even a respectable governess. We feel a certain gratitude to her for devoting four hours to supper; and, indeed, Richardson's characters are always well cared for in the victualling department. They always take their solid three meals, with a liberal intercalation of dishes of tea and chocolate. Miss Harlowe, we must add, knew Latin, although her quotations of classical authors are generally taken from translations. Her successor, Miss Byron, was not allowed this accomplishment, Richardson's doubts of its suitability to ladies having apparently gathered strength in the interval. Notwithstanding this one audacious excursion into the regions of manly knowledge, Miss Harlowe appears to us as, in the main, a healthy, sensible, country girl, with sound sense, the highest respect for decorum, and an exaggerated regard for constituted, especially paternal, authority. We cannot expect, from her, any of the outbreaks against the laws of society customary with George Sand's heroines. If she had changed places with Maggie Tulliver, she would have accepted the society of the *Mill on the Floss* with perfect contentment, respected all the family of aunts and uncles, and never repined against the tyranny of

her brother Tom. She would have been conscious of no vague imaginative yearnings, nor have beaten herself against the narrow bars of stolid custom. She would have laid up a vast store of linen, and walked thankfully in the path chalked out for her. Certainly she would never have run away with Mr. Stephen Guest without tyranny of a much more tangible kind than that which acts only through the finer spiritual tissues. When Clarissa went off with Lovelace, it was not because she had unsatisfied aspirations after a higher order of life, but because she had been locked up in her room, as a solitary prisoner, and her family had tried to force her into marriage with a man whom she had excellent reasons for hating and despising. The worst point about Clarissa is one which was keenly noticed by Johnson. There is always something, he said, which she prefers to truth. She is a little too anxious to keep up appearances, and we desire to see more of the natural woman.

Yet the long tragedy in which Clarissa is the victim is not the less affecting because the torments are of an intelligible kind, and require no highly-strung sensibility to give them keenness. The heroine is first bullied and then deserted by her family, cut off from the friends who have a desire to help her, and handed over to the power

of an unscrupulous libertine. When she dies of a broken heart, the most callous and prosaic of readers must feel that it is the only release possible for her. And in the gradual development of his plot, the slow accumulation of horrors upon the head of a virtuous victim, Richardson shows the power which places him in the front rank of novelists, and finds precisely the field in which his method is most effective and its drawbacks least annoying. In the first place, in spite of his enormous prolixity, the interest is throughout concentrated upon one figure. In *Sir Charles Grandison* there are episodes meant to illustrate the virtues of the "next-to-divine man" which have nothing to do with the main narrative. In *Clarissa* every subordinate plot—and they abound—bears immediately upon the central action of the story, and produces a constant alternation of hope and foreboding. The last volumes, indeed, are dragged out in a way which is injurious in several respects. Clarissa, to use Charles II.'s expression about himself, takes an unconscionable time about dying. But until the climax is reached, we see the clouds steadily gathering, and yet with an increasing hope that they may be suddenly cleared up. The only English novel which produces a similar effect, and impresses us with the sense of an inexorable fate, slowly but

steadily approaching, is the *Bride of Lammermoor* —in some respects the best and most artistic of Scott's novels. Superior as is Scott's art in certain directions, we scarcely feel the same interest in his chief characters, though there is the same unity of construction. We cannot feel for the Master of Ravenswood the sympathy which Clarissa extorts. For in Clarissa's profound distress we lose sight of the narrow round of respectabilities in which her earlier life is passed; the petty pompousness, the intense propriety which annoy us in *Sir Charles Grandison* disappear or become pathetic. When people are dying of broken hearts we forget their little absurdities of costume. A more powerful note is sounded, and the little superficial absurdities are forgotten. We laugh at the first feminine description of her dress—a Brussels-lace cap, with sky-blue ribbon, pale crimson-coloured paduasoy, with cuffs embroidered in a running pattern of violets and their leaves; but we are more disposed to cry (if many novels have not exhausted all our powers of weeping) when we come to the final scene.

One faded cheek rested upon the good woman's bosom, the kindly warmth of which had overspread it with a faint but charming flush; the other paler and hollow, as if already iced over by death. Her hands, white as the lily, with her meandering veins more

transparently blue than ever I had seen even hers, hanging lifelessly, one before her, the other grasped by the right hand of the kindly widow, whose tears bedewed the sweet face which her motherly bosom supported, though unfelt by the fair sleeper; and either insensibly to the good woman, or what she would not disturb her to wipe off or to change her posture. Her aspect was sweetly calm and serene; and though she started now and then, yet her sleep seemed easy; her breath indeed short and quick, but tolerably free, and not like that of a dying person.

Allowing for the queer grammar, this is surely a touching and simple picture. The epistolary method, though it has its dangers, lends itself well to heighten our interest. Where the object is rather to appeal to our sympathies than to give elaborate analyses of character, or complicated narratives of incident, it is as well to let the persons speak for themselves. A hero cannot conveniently say, like Sir Charles Grandison, "See how virtuous and brave and modest I am;" nor is it easy to make a story clear when it has to be broken up and distributed amongst people speaking from different points of view; it is hard to make the testimonies of the different witnesses fit into each other neatly. But a cry of agony can come from no other quarter so effectively as from the sufferer's own mouth. *Clarissa Harlowe* is in fact one long lamentation, passing gradually from

a tone of indignant complaint to one of despair, and rising at the end to Christian resignation. So prolonged a performance in every key of human misery is indeed painful from its monotony; and we may admit that a limited selection from the correspondence, passing through more rapid gradations, would be more effective. We might be spared some of the elaborate speculations upon various phases of the affair which pass away without any permanent effect. Richardson seems to be scarcely content even with drawing his characters as large as life; he wishes to apply a magnifying-glass. Yet, even in this incessant repetition there is a certain element of power. We are forced to drain every drop in the cup, and to appreciate every ingredient which adds bitterness to its flavour. We are annoyed and wearied at times; but as we read we not only wonder at the number of variations performed upon one tune, but feel that he has succeeded in thoroughly forcing upon our minds, by incessant hammering, the impression which he desires to produce. If the blows are not all very powerful, each blow tells. There is something impressive in the intensity of purpose which keeps one end in view through so elaborate a process, and the skill which forms such a multitudinous variety of parts into one artistic whole. The proportions of this gigan-

tic growth are preserved with a skill which would be singular even in the normal scale; a respect in which most giants, whether human or literary, are apt to break down.

To make the story complete, the plot should have been as effectively conceived as Clarissa herself, and the other characters should be equally worthy of their position. Here there are certain drawbacks. The plot, it might easily be shown, is utterly incredible. Richardson has the greatest difficulty in preventing his heroine from escaping, and at times we must not look too closely for fear of detecting the flimsy nature of her imaginary chains. There is, indeed, no reason for looking closely; so long as the situations bring out the desired sentiment, we may accept them for the nonce, without asking whether they could possibly have occurred. It is of more importance to judge of the consistency of the chief agent in the persecution. Lovelace is by far the most ambitious character that Richardson has attempted. To heap together a mass of virtues, and christen the result Clarissa Harlowe or Charles Grandison, is comparatively easy; but it is a harder task to compose a villain, who shall be by nature a devil, and yet capable of imposing upon an angel. Some of Richardson's judicious critics declared that he must have been himself a man

of vicious life or he could never have described a libertine so vividly. This is one of the smart sayings which are obviously the proper thing to say, but which, notwithstanding, are little better than silly. Lovelace is evidently a fancy character —if we may use the expression. He bears not a single mark of being painted from life, and is formed by the simple process of putting together the most brilliant qualities which his creator could devise to meet the occasion. We do not say that the result is psychologically impossible; for it would be very rash to dogmatise on any such question. No one can say what strange amalgams of virtue and vice may have sufficient stability to hold together during a journey through this world. But it is plain that Lovelace is not a result of observation, but an almost fantastic mixture of qualities intended to fit him for the difficult part he has to play. To exalt Clarissa, for example, Lovelace's family are represented as all along earnestly desirous of a marriage between them; and Lovelace has every conceivable motive, including the desire to avoid hanging, for agreeing to the match. His refusal is unintelligible, and Richardson has to supply him with a reason so absurd and so diabolical that we cannot believe in it; it reminds us of Hamlet's objecting to killing his uncle whilst at prayers, on the

ground that it would be sending him straight to heaven. But we may, if we please, consider Hamlet's conceit as a mere pretext invented to excuse his irresolution to himself; whereas Lovelace speculates so long and so seriously upon the marriage, that we are bound to consider his far-fetched arguments as sincere. And the supposition makes his wickedness gratuitous, if we believe in his sanity. Lovelace suffers, again, from the same necessity which injures Sir Charles Grandison; as the virtuous hero has to be always expatiating on his own virtues, the vicious hero has to boast of his own vices; it is true that this is, in an artistic sense, the least repulsive habit of the two; for it gives reason for hating not a hero but a villain; unluckily it is also a reason for refusing to believe in his existence. The improbability of a thoroughpaced scoundrel writing daily elaborate confessions of his criminality to a friend, even when the friend condemns him, expatiating upon atrocities that deserved hanging, and justifying his vices on principle, is rather too glaring to be admissible. And by another odd inconsistency, Lovelace is described as being all the time a steady believer in eternal punishment and a rebuker of sceptics—Richardson being apparently of opinion that infidelity would be too bad to be introduced upon the stage, though a

vice might be described in detail. A man who has broken through all moral laws might be allowed a little free-thinking. We might add that Lovelace, in spite of the cleverness attributed to him, is really a most imbecile schemer. The first principle of a villain should be to tell as few lies as will serve his purpose; but Lovelace invents such elaborate and complicated plots, presenting so many chances of detection and introducing so many persons into his secrets, that it is evident that in real life he would have broken down in a week.

Granting the high improbability of Lovelace as a real living human being, it must be admitted that he has every merit but that of existence. The letters which he writes are the most animated in the voluminous correspondence. The respectable domestic old printer, who boasted of the perfect purity of his own life, seems to have thrown himself with special gusto into the character of a heartless reprobate. He must have felt a certain piquancy in writing down the most atrocious sentiments in his own respectable parlour. He would show that the quiet humdrum old tradesman could be on paper as sprightly and audacious as the most profligate man about town. As quiet people are apt to do, he probably exaggerated the enormities which such men would openly avow;

he fancied that the world beyond his little circle was a wilderness of wild beasts who could gnash their teeth and show their claws after a terribly ostentatious fashion in their own dens; they doubtless gloated upon all the innocent sheep whom they had devoured without any shadow of reticence. And he had a fancy that, in their way, they were amusing monsters too; Lovelace is a lady's villain, as Grandison is a lady's hero; he is designed by a person inexperienced even in the observation of vice. Indeed, he would exaggerate the charm a good deal more than the atrocity. We must also admit that when the old printer was put upon his mettle he could be very lively indeed. Lovelace, like everybody else, is at times unmercifully prolix; he never leaves us to guess any detail for ourselves; but he is spirited, eloquent, and a thoroughly fine gentleman after the Chesterfield type. "The devil take such fine gentlemen!" exclaims somebody; and if he does not, I see little use (to quote the proverbial old lady) in keeping a devil. But, as Johnson observed, a man may be very wicked and "very genteel." Richardson lectures us very seriously on the evil results which are sure to follow bad courses; but he evidently holds in his heart that, till the Nemesis descends, the libertines are far the most amusing part of the world. In Sir

Charles Grandison's company, we should be treated to an intolerable deal of sermonising, with an occasional descent into the regions of humour —but the humour is always admitted under protest. With Lovelace we might hear some very questionable morality, but there would be a never-ceasing flow of sparkling witticisms. The devil's advocate has the laugh distinctly on his side, whatever may be said of the argument. Finally, we may say that Lovelace, if too obviously constructed to work the plot, certainly works it well. When we coolly dissect him and ask whether he could ever have existed, we may be forced to reply in the negative. But whilst we read we forget to criticise; he seems to possess more vitality than most living men; he is so full of eloquent brag, and audacious sophistry, and unblushing impudence, that he fascinates us as he is supposed to have bewildered Clarissa. The dragon who is to devour the maiden comes with all the flash and glitter and overpowering whirl of wings that can be desired. He seems to be irresistible—we admire him and hate him, and some time elapses before we begin to suspect that he is merely a stage dragon, and not one of those who really walk this earth.

Richardson's defects are, of course, obvious enough. He cares nothing, for example, for what

we call the beauties of nature. There is scarcely throughout his books one description showing the power of appealing to emotions through scenery claimed by every modern scribbler. In passing the Alps, the only remark which one of his characters has to make, beyond describing the horrible dangers of the Mont Cenis, is that "every object which here presents itself is excessively miserable." His ideal scenery is a "large and convenient country-house, situated in a spacious park," with plenty of "fine prospects," which you are expected to view from a "neat but plain villa, built in the rustic taste." And his views of morality are as contracted as his taste in landscapes. The most distinctive article of his creed is that children should have a reverence for their parents which would be exaggerated in the slave of an Eastern despot. We can pardon Clarissa for refusing to die happy until her stupid and ill-tempered old father has revoked a curse which he bestowed upon her. But we cannot quite excuse Sir Charles Grandison for writing in this fashion to his disreputable old parent, who has asked his consent to a certain family arrangement in which he had a legal right to be consulted:

As for myself [he says] I cannot have one objection; but what am I in this case? My sister is wholly my father's; I also am his. The consideration he gives

me in this instance confounds me. It binds me to him in double duty. It would look like taking advantage of it, were I so much as to offer my humble opinion, unless he were pleased to command it from me.

Even one of Richardson's abject lady-correspondents was revolted by this exaggerated servility. But narrow as his vision might be in some directions, his genius is not the less real. He is a curious example of the power which a real artistic insight may exhibit under the most disadvantageous forms. To realise his characteristic power, we should take one of the great French novelists whom we admire for the exquisite proportions of his story, the unity of the interest and the skill—so unlike our common English clumsiness—with which all details are duly subordinated. He should have, too, the comparative weakness of French novelists, a defective perception of character, a certain unwillingness in art as in politics to allow individual peculiarities to interfere with the main flow of events; for, admitting the great excellence of his minor performers, Richardson's most elaborately designed characters are so artificial that they derive their interest from the events in which they play their parts, rather than give interest to them—little as he may have intended it. Then we must cause our

imaginary Frenchman to transmigrate into the body of a small, plump, weakly printer of the eighteenth century. We may leave him a fair share of his vivacity, though considerably narrowing his views of life and morality; but we must surround him with a court of silly women whose incessant flatteries must generate in him an unnatural propensity to twaddle. It is curious, indeed, that he describes himself as writing without a plan. He compares himself to a poor woman lying down upon the hearth to blow up a wretched little fire of green sticks. He had to live from hand to mouth. But the absence of an elaborate scheme is not fatal to the unity of design. He watches, rather than designs, the development of his plot. He has so lively a faith in his characters that, instead of laying down their course of action, he simply watches them to see how they will act. This makes him deliberate a little too much; they move less by impulse than from careful reflection upon all the circumstances. Yet it also implies an evolution of the story from the necessity of the characters in a given situation, and gives an air of necessary deduction to the whole scheme of his stories. All the gossiping propensities of his nature will grow to unhealthy luxuriance, and the fine edge of his wit will be somewhat dulled in the process. He will thus

become capable of being a bore—a thing which is impossible to any unsophisticated Frenchman. In this way we might obtain a literary product so anomalous in appearance as *Clarissa*—a story in which a most affecting situation is drawn with extreme power, and yet so overlaid with twaddle, so unmercifully protracted and spun out as to be almost unreadable to the present generation. But to complete Richardson, we must inoculate him with the propensities of another school: we must give him a liberal share of the feminine sensitiveness and closeness of observation of which Miss Austen is the great example. And perhaps, to fill in the last details, he ought, in addition, to have a dash of the more unctuous and offensive variety of the dissenting preacher—for we know not where else to look for the astonishing and often ungrammatical fluency by which he is possessed, and which makes his best passages remind us of the marvellous malleability of some precious metals.

Any one who will take the trouble to work himself fairly into the story will end by admitting Richardson's power. Sir George Trevelyan records and corroborates a well-known anecdote told by Thackeray from Macaulay's lips. A whole station was infected by the historian's zeal for *Clarissa*. It worked itself up into a "passion of excitement," and all the great men and their wives

fought for the book, and could hardly read it for tears. The critic must observe that Macaulay had a singular taste for reading even the trashiest novels; and, that probably an Indian station at that period was in respect of such reading like a thirsty land after a long drought. For that reason it reproduced pretty accurately the state of society in which *Clarissa* was first read, when there were as yet no circulating libraries, and the winter evenings were long in the country and the back parlours of tradesmen's shops. Probably, a person eager to enjoy Richardson's novels now would do well to take them as his only recreation for a long holiday in a remote place and pray for steady rain. On those conditions, he may enter into the old spirit. And the remark may suggest one moral, for one ought not to conclude an article upon Richardson without a moral. It is that a purpose may be a very dangerous thing for a novelist in so far as it leads him to try means of persuasion not appropriate to his art; but when, as with Richardson, it implies a keen interest in an imaginary world, a desire to set forth in the most forcible way what are the great springs of action of human beings by showing them under appropriate situations, then it may be a source of such power of fascination as is exercised by the greatest writers alone.

# Pope as a Moralist

The vitality of Pope's writings, or at least of certain fragments of them, is remarkable. Few reputations have been exposed to such perils at the hands of open enemies or of imprudent friends. In his lifetime "the wasp of Twickenham" could sting through a sevenfold covering of pride or stupidity. Lady Mary and Lord Hervey writhed and retaliated with little more success than the poor denizens of Grub Street. But it is more remarkable that Pope seems to be stinging well into the second century after his death. His writings resemble those fireworks which, after they have fallen to the ground and been apparently quenched, suddenly break out again into spluttering explosions. The waters of a literary revolution have passed over him without putting him out. Though much of his poetry has ceased to interest us, so many of his brilliant couplets still survive that probably no dead writer, with the solitary exception of Shakespeare, is more frequently quoted at the present day. It is in vain

that he is abused, ridiculed, and often declared to be no poet at all. The school of Wordsworth regarded him as the embodiment of the corrupting influence in English poetry; and it is only of late that we are beginning to aim at a more catholic spirit in literary criticism. It is not our business simply to revile or to extol the ideals of our ancestors, but to try to understand them. The passionate partisanship of militant schools is pardonable in the apostles of a new creed, but when the struggle is over we must aim at saner judgments. Byron was impelled by motives other than the purely judicial when he declared Pope to be the "great moral poet of all times, of all climes, of all feelings, and of all stages of existence;" and it is not less characteristic that Byron was at the same time helping to dethrone the idol before which he prostrated himself. A critic whose judgments, however wayward, are always keen and original, has more recently spoken of Pope in terms which recall Byron's enthusiasm. "Pope," says Mr. Ruskin, in one of his Oxford lectures, "is the most perfect representative we have since Chaucer of the true English mind;" and he adds that his hearers will find, as they study Pope, that he has expressed for them,

in the strictest language, and within the briefest limits, every law of art, of criticism, of economy, of

policy, and finally of a benevolence, humble, rational, and resigned, contented with its allotted share of life, and trusting the problem of its salvation to Him in whose hand lies that of the universe.

These remarks are added by way of illustrating the relation of art to morals, and enforcing the great principle that a noble style can only proceed from a sincere heart. "You can only learn to speak as these men spake by learning what these men were." When we ask impartially what Pope was, we may possibly be inclined to doubt the complete soundness of the eulogy upon his teaching. Meanwhile, however, Byron and Mr. Ruskin agree in holding up Pope as an instance, almost as the typical instance, of that kind of poetry which is directly intended to enforce a lofty morality. Though we can never take either Byron or Mr. Ruskin as the representative of sweet reasonableness, their admiration is some proof that Pope possessed great merits as a poetical interpreter of morals. Without venturing into the wider ocean of poetical criticism, I will endeavour to consider what was the specific element in Pope's poetry which explains, if it does not justify, this enthusiastic praise.

I shall venture to assume, indeed, that Pope was a genuine poet. Perhaps, as M. Taine thinks, it is a proof of our British grossness that we still

admire the *Rape of the Lock*, yet I must agree with most critics that it is admirable after its kind. Pope's sylphs, as Mr. Elwin says, are legitimate descendants from Shakespeare's fairies. True, they have entered into rather humiliating bondage. Shakespeare's Ariel has to fetch the midnight dew from the still-vexed Bermoothes; he delights to fly—

> To swim, to dive into the fire, to ride
> On the curl'd clouds—

whereas the "humbler province" of Pope's Ariel is "to tend the fair"—

> To steal from rainbows, ere they drop in showers,
> A brighter wash; to curl their waving hairs,
> Assist their blushes, and inspire their airs,
> Nay, oft in dreams invention we bestow
> To change a flounce or add a furbelow.

Prospero, threatening Ariel for murmuring, says "I will

> rend an oak
> And peg thee in his knotty entrails, until
> Thou hast howled away twelve winters.

The fate threatened to a disobedient sprite in the later poem is that he shall

> Be stuff'd in vials, or transfixed with pins,
> Or plunged in lakes of bitter washes lie,
> Or wedged whole ages in a bodkin's eye.

Pope's muse—one may use the old-fashioned word in such a connection—had left the free forest for Will's Coffee-house, and haunted ladies' boudoirs instead of the brakes of the enchanted island. Her wings were clogged with "gums and pomatums," and her "thin essence" had shrunk "like a rivel'd flower." But a delicate fancy is a delicate fancy still, even when employed about the paraphernalia of modern life; a truth which Byron maintained, though not in an unimpeachable form, in his controversy with Bowles. We sometimes talk as if our ancestors were nothing but hoops and wigs; and forget that they had a fair allowance of human passions. And consequently we are very apt to make a false estimate of the precise nature of that change which fairly entitles us to call Pope's age prosaic. In showering down our epithets of artificial, sceptical, and utilitarian, we not seldom forget what kind of figure we are ourselves likely to make in the eyes of our own descendants.

Whatever be the position rightly to be assigned to Pope in the British Walhalla, his own theory has been unmistakably expressed. He boasts

> That not in fancy's maze he wandered long,
> But stooped to truth and moralised his song.

His theory is compressed into one of the innum-

erable aphorisms which have to some degree lost their original sharpness of definition, because they have passed, as current coinage, through so many hands.

The proper study of mankind is man.

The saying is in form nearly identical with Goethe's remark that man is properly the only object which interests man. The two poets, indeed, understood the doctrine in a very different way. Pope's interpretation strikes the present generation as narrow and mechanical. He would place such limitations upon the sphere of human interest as to exclude, perhaps, the greatest part of what we generally mean by poetry. How much, for example, would have to be suppressed if we sympathised with Pope's condemnation of the works in which

Pure description holds the place of sense.

Nearly all the works of such poets as Thomson and Cowper would disappear, Wordsworth's pages would show fearful gaps, and Keats would be in risk of summary suppression. We may doubt whether much would be left of Spenser, from whom both Keats and Pope, like so many other of our poets, drew inspiration in their youth. Fairy-land would be deserted, and the poet con-

demned to working upon ordinary commonplaces in broad daylight. The principle which Pope proclaimed is susceptible of the inverse application. Poetry, as it proves, may rightly concern itself with inanimate nature, with pure description, or with the presentation of lovely symbols not definitely identified with any cut-and-dried saws of moral wisdom; because there is no part of the visible universe to which we have not some relation, and the most ethereal dreams that ever visited a youthful poet "on summer eve by haunted stream" are in some sense reflections of the passions and interests that surround our daily life. Pope, however, as the man more fitted than any other fully to interpret the mind of his own age, inevitably gives a different construction to a very sound maxim. He rightly assumes that man is his proper study; but then by man he means not the genus, but a narrow species of the human being. "Man" means Bolingbroke, and Walpole, and Swift, and Curll, and Theobald; it does not mean man as the product of a long series of generations and part of the great universe of inextricably involved forces. He cannot understand the man of distant ages; Homer is to him not the spontaneous voice of the heroic age, but a clever artist whose gods and heroes are consciously-constructed parts of an artificial "ma-

chinery." Nature has, for him, ceased to be inhabited by sylphs and fairies, except to amuse the fancies of fine ladies and gentlemen, and has not yet received a new interest from the fairy tales of science. The old idea of chivalry merely suggests the sneers of Cervantes, or even the buffoonery of Butler's wit, and has not undergone restoration at the hands of modern romanticists. Politics are not associated in his mind with any great social upheaval, but with a series of petty squabbles for places and pensions, in which bribery is the great moving force. What he means by religion is generally not so much the existence of a divine element in the world as a series of bare metaphysical demonstrations too frigid to produce enthusiasm or to stimulate the imagination. And, therefore, he inevitably interests himself chiefly in what is certainly a perennial source of interest—the passions and thoughts of the men and women immediately related to himself; and it may be remarked, in passing, that if this narrows the range of Pope's poetry, the error is not so vital as a modern delusion of the opposite kind. Because poetry should not be brought into too close a contact with the prose of daily life, we sometimes seem to think that it must have no relation to daily life at all, and consequently convert it into a mere luxurious dreaming, where

the beautiful very speedily degenerates into the pretty or the picturesque. Because poetry need not be always a point-blank fire of moral platitudes, we occasionally declare that there is no connection at all between poetry and morality, and that all art is good which is for the moment agreeable. Such theories must end in reducing all poetry and art to be at best more or less elegant trifling for the amusement of the indolent; and to those who uphold them Pope's example may be of some use. If he went too far in the direction of identifying poetry with preaching, he was not wrong in assuming that poetry should involve preaching, though by an indirect method. Morality and art are not independent, though not identical. Both, as Mr. Ruskin urges in the passage just quoted, are only admirable when the expression of healthful and noble natures. But, without discussing that thorny problem and certainly without committing myself to an approval of Mr. Ruskin's solution, I am content to look at it for the time from Pope's standpoint.

Taking Pope's view of his poetical office, there remain considerable difficulties in estimating the value of the lesson which he taught with so much energy. The difficulties result both from that element which was common to his contemporaries and from that which was supplied by Pope's own

idiosyncrasies. The commonplaces in which Pope takes such infinite delight have become very stale for us. Assuming their perfect sincerity, we cannot understand how anybody should have thought of enforcing them with such amazing emphasis. We constantly feel a shock like that which surprises the reader of Young's *Night Thoughts* when he finds it asserted, in all the pomp of blank verse that

> Procrastination is the thief of time.

The maxim has rightly been consigned to copy-books. And a great deal of Pope's moralising is of the same order. We do not want denunciations of misers. Nobody at the present day keeps gold in an old stocking. When we read the observation,

> 'T is strange the miser should his cares employ
> To gain the riches he can ne'er enjoy,

we can only reply that we have heard something like it before. In fact, we cannot place ourselves in the position of men at the time when modern society was first definitely emerging from the feudal state, and everybody was sufficiently employed in gossiping about his neighbours. We are perplexed by the extreme interest with which they dwell upon the little series of obvious remarks

which have been worked to death by later writers. Pope, for example, is still wondering over the first appearance of one of the most familiar of modern inventions. He exclaims,

> Blest paper credit! last and best supply!
> That lends corruption lighter wings to fly!

He points out, with an odd superfluity of illustration, that bank-notes enable a man to be bribed much more easily than of old. There is no danger, he says, that a patriot will be exposed by a guinea dropping out of his pocket at the end of an interview with the minister; and he shows how awkward it would be if a statesman had to take his bribes in kind, and his servants should proclaim,

> Sir, Spain has sent a thousand jars of oil;
> Huge bales of British cloth blockade the door;
> A hundred oxen at your levees roar.

This, however, was natural enough when the South Sea scheme was for the first time illustrating the powers and the dangers of extended credit. To us, who are beginning to fit our experience of commercial panics into a scientific theory, the wonder expressed by Pope sounds like the exclamations of a savage over a Tower musket. And in the sphere of morals it is pretty much the same. All those reflections about the little obvi-

ous vanities and frivolities of social life which supplied two generations of British essayists, from the "Tatler" to the "Lounger," with an inexhaustible fund of mild satire, have lost their freshness. Our own modes of life have become so complex by comparison, that we pass over these mere elements to plunge at once into more refined speculations. A modern essayist starts where Addison or Johnson left off. He assumes that his readers know that procrastination is an evil, and tries to gain a little piquancy by paradoxically pointing out the objections to punctuality. Character, of course, becomes more complex, and requires more delicate modes of analysis. Compare, for example, the most delicate of Pope's delineations with one of Mr. Browning's elaborate psychological studies. Remember how many pages of acute observation are required to set forth Bishop Blougram's peculiar phase of worldliness, and then turn to Pope's descriptions of Addison, or Wharton, or Buckingham. Each of those descriptions is, indeed, a masterpiece in its way; the language is inimitably clear and pointed; but the leading thought is obvious, and leads to no intricate problems. Addison—assuming Pope's Addison to be the real Addison—might be cold-blooded and jealous; but he had not worked out that elaborate machinery for imposing upon himself and others

which is required in a more critical age. He wore a mask, but a mask of simple construction; not one of those complex contrivances of modern invention which are so like the real skin that it requires the acuteness and patience of a scientific observer to detect the difference and point out the nature of the deception. The moral difference between such an Addison and a Blougram is as great as the difference between an old stage-coach and a steam-engine, or between the bulls and bears which first received the name in Law's time and their descendants on the New York Stock Exchange.

If, therefore, Pope gains something in clearness and brilliancy by the comparative simplicity of his art, he loses by the extreme obviousness of its results. We cannot give him credit for being really moved by such platitudes. We have the same feeling as when a modern preacher employs twenty minutes in proving that it is wrong to worship idols of wood and stone. But, unfortunately, there is a reason more peculiar to Pope which damps our sympathy still more decidedly. Recent investigations have strengthened those suspicions of his honesty which were common even amongst his contemporaries. Mr. Elwin was (very excusably) disgusted by the revelations of his hero's baseness, till his indignation became

a painful burden to himself and his readers. Speaking bluntly, indeed, we admit that lying is a vice, and that Pope was in a small way one of the most consummate liars that ever lived. He speaks himself of "equivocating pretty genteelly" in regard to one of his peccadilloes. Pope's equivocation is to the equivocation of ordinary men what a tropical fern is to the stunted representatives of the same species in England. It grows until the fowls of the air can rest on its branches. His mendacity in short amounts to a monomania. That a man with intensely irritable nerves, and so fragile in constitution that his life might, without exaggeration, be called a "long disease," should defend himself by the natural weapons of the weak, equivocation and subterfuge, when exposed to the brutal horse-play common in that day, is indeed not surprising. But Pope's delight in artifice was something unparalleled. He could hardly drink tea without "a stratagem," or, as Lady Bolingbroke put it, was a politician about cabbages and turnips; and certainly he did not despise the arts known to politicians on a larger stage. Never, surely, did all the arts of the most skilful diplomacy give rise to a series of intrigues more complex than those which attended the publication of the *P. T. Letters.* An ordinary man says that he is

obliged to publish by request of friends, and we regard the transparent device as, at most, a venial offence. But in Pope's hands this simple trick becomes a complex apparatus of plots within plots, which have only been unravelled by the persevering labours of most industrious literary detectives. The whole story was given for the first time at full length in Mr. Elwin's edition of Pope, and the revelation borders upon the incredible. How Pope became for a time two men; how in one character he worked upon the wretched Curll through mysterious emissaries until the piratical bookseller undertook to publish the letters already privately printed by Pope himself; how Pope in his other character protested vehemently against the publication and disavowed all complicity in the preparations; how he set the House of Lords in motion to suppress the edition; and how, meanwhile, he took ingenious precautions to frustrate the interference which he provoked; how in the course of these manœuvres his genteel equivocation swelled into lying on the most stupendous scale—all this story, with its various ins and outs, may be now read by those who have the patience. The problem may be suggested to casuists how far the iniquity of a lie should be measured by its immediate purpose, or how far it is aggravated by the enormous

mass of superincumbent falsehoods which it inevitably brings in its train. We cannot condemn very seriously the affected coyness which tries to conceal a desire for publication under an apparent yielding to extortion; but we must certainly admit that the stomach of any other human being of whom a record has been preserved would have revolted at the thought of wading through such a waste of falsification to secure so paltry an end. Moreover, this is only one instance, and by no means the worst instance, of Pope's regular practice in such matters. Almost every publication of his life was attended with some sort of mystification passing into downright falsehood, and, at times, injurious to the character of his dearest friends. We have to add to this all the cases in which Pope attacked his enemies under feigned names and then disavowed his attacks; the malicious misstatements which he tried to propagate in regard to Addison; and we feel it a positive relief when we are able to acquit him, partially at least, of the worst charge of extorting 1,000*l.* from the Duchess of Marlborough for the suppression of a satirical passage.

Whatever minor pleas may be put forward in extenuation, it certainly cannot be denied that Pope's practical morality was defective. Genteel equivocation is not one of the Christian graces;

and a gentleman convicted at the present day of practices comparable to those in which Pope indulged so freely might find it expedient to take his name off the books of any respectable club. Now, if we take literally Mr. Ruskin's doctrine that a noble morality must proceed from a noble nature, the inference from Pope's life to his writings is not satisfactory.

We may, indeed, take it for demonstrated that Pope was not one of those men who can be seen from all points of view. There are corners of his nature which will not bear examination. We cannot compare him with such men as Milton, or Cowper, or Wordsworth, whose lives are the noblest commentary on their works. Rather he is one of the numerous class in whom the excessive sensibility of genius has generated very serious disease. In more modern days we may fancy that his views would have taken a different turn, and that Pope would have belonged to the Satanic school of writers, and instead of lying enormously, have found relief for his irritated nerves in reviling all that is praised by ordinary mankind. But we must hesitate before passing from his acknowledged vices to a summary condemnation of the whole man. Human nature (the remark is not strictly original) is often inconsistent; and, side by side with degrading tendencies, there some-

times lie not only keen powers of intellect, but a genuine love for goodness, benevolence, and even for honesty. Pope is one of those strangely mixed characters which can only be fully delineated by a masterly hand, and Mr. Courthope in the life which concludes the definitive edition of the works has at last performed the task with admirable skill and without too much shrouding his hero's weaknesses. Meanwhile our pleasure in reading him is much counterbalanced by the suspicion that those pointed aphorisms which he turns out in so admirably polished a form may come only from the lips outwards. Pope, it must be remembered, is essentially a parasitical writer. He was a systematic appropriator—I do not say plagiarist, for the practice seems to be generally commendable—of other men's thoughts. His brilliant gems have often been found in some obscure writer, and have become valuable by the patient care with which he has polished and mounted them. We doubt their perfect sincerity because, when he is speaking in his own person, we can often prove him to be at best under a curious delusion. Take, for example, the *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*, which is his most perfect work. Some of the boasts in it are apparently quite justified by the facts. But what are we to say to such a passage as this?—

> I was not born for courts or great affairs;
> I pay my debts, believe, and say my prayers;
> Can sleep without a poem in my head,
> Nor know if Dennis be alive or dead.

Admitting his independence, and not inquiring too closely into his prayers, can we forget that the gentleman who could sleep without a poem in his head called up a servant four times in one night of "the dreadful winter of Forty" to supply him with paper, lest he should lose a thought? Or what is the value of a professed indifference to Dennis from the man distinguished beyond all other writers for the bitterness of his resentment against all small critics; who disfigured his best poems by his petty vengeance for old attacks; and who could not refrain from sneering at poor Dennis, even in the Prologue which he condescended to write for the benefit of his dying antagonist? Or, again, one can hardly help smiling at his praises of his own hospitality. The dinner which he promises to his friend is to conclude with—

> Cheerful healths (your mistress shall have place),
> And, what's more rare, a poet shall say grace.

The provision made for the "cheerful healths," as Johnson lets us know, consisted of the remnant of a pint of wine, from which Pope had taken

a couple of glasses, divided amongst two guests. There was evidently no danger of excessive conviviality. And then a grace in which Bolingbroke joined could not have been a very impressive ceremony.

Thus, we are always pursued, in reading Pope, by disagreeable misgivings. We don't know what comes from the heart, and what from the lips: when the real man is speaking, and when we are only listening to old commonplaces skilfully vamped. There is always, if we please, a bad interpretation to be placed upon his finest sentiments. His indignation against the vicious is confused with his hatred of personal enemies; he protests most loudly that he is honest when he is "equivocating most genteelly;" his independence may be called selfishness or avarice; his toleration simply indifference; and even his affection for his friends a decorous fiction, which will never lead him to the slightest sacrifice of his own vanity or comfort. A critic of the highest order is provided with an Ithuriel spear, which discriminates the sham sentiments from the true. As a banker's clerk can tell a bad coin by its ring on the counter, without need of a testing apparatus, the true critic can instinctively estimate the amount of bullion in Pope's epigrammatic tinsel. But criticism of this kind, as Pope truly says, is as

rare as poetical genius. Humbler writers must be content to take their weights and measures, or, in other words, to test their first impressions, by such external evidence as is available. They must proceed cautiously in these delicate matters, and instead of leaping to the truth by a rapid intuition, patiently enquire what light is thrown upon Pope's sincerity by the recorded events of his life, and a careful cross-examination of the various witnesses to his character. They must, indeed, keep in mind Mr. Ruskin's excellent canon—that good fruit, even in moralising, can only be borne by a good tree. Where Pope has succeeded in casting into enduring form some valuable moral sentiment, we may therefore give him credit for having at least felt it sincerely. If he did not always act upon it, the weakness is not peculiar to Pope. Time, indeed, has partly done the work for us. In Pope, more than in almost any other writer, the grain has sifted itself from the chaff. The jewels have remained after the flimsy embroidery in which they were fixed has fallen into decay. Such a result was natural from his mode of composition. He caught at some inspiration of the moment; he cast it roughly into form; brooded over it; retouched it again and again; and when he had brought it to the very highest polish of which his art was capable, placed it in a

pigeon-hole to be fitted, when the opportunity offered, into an appropriate corner of his mosaic work. We can see him at work, for example, in the passage about Addison and the celebrated concluding couplet. The epigrams in which his poetry abounds have obviously been composed in the same fashion, for that "masterpiece of man," as South is made to call it in the *Dunciad*, is only produced in perfection when the labour which would have made an ode has been concentrated upon a couple of lines. There is a celebrated recipe for dressing a lark, if we remember rightly, in which the lark is placed inside a snipe, and the snipe in a woodcock, and so on till you come to a turkey, or if procurable, to an ostrich; then, the mass having been properly stewed, the superincumbent envelopes are all thrown away, and the essences of the whole are supposed to be embodied in the original nucleus. So the perfect epigram, at which Pope is constantly aiming, should be the quintessence of a whole volume of reflection. Such literary cookery, however, implies not only labour, but an unwearied vividness of thought and feeling. The poet must put his soul into the work as well as his artistic power. Thus, if we may take Pope's most vigorous expressions as an indication of his strongest convictions, and check their conclusions by his personal history and by the

general tendency of his writings, we might succeed in putting together something like a satisfactory statement of the moral system which he expressed forcibly because he believed in it sincerely.

Without following the proofs in detail, let us endeavour to give some statement of the result. What, in fact, did Pope learn by his study of man, such as it was? What does he tell us about the character of human beings and their position in the universe which is either original or marked by the freshness of independent thought? Perhaps the most characteristic vein of reflection is that which is embodied in the *Dunciad*. There, at least, we have Pope speaking energetically and sincerely. He really detests, abjures, and abominates as impious and heretical, without a trace of mental reservation, the worship of the great goddess Dulness. The *Dunciad* does not show the quality in which Pope most excels, that which makes his best satires resemble the quintessence of the most brilliant thought of his most brilliant contemporaries. But it has more energy and continuity than most of his other poetry. The *Dunciad* often flows in a continuous stream of eloquence, instead of dribbling out in little jets of epigram. If there are fewer points, there are more frequent gushes of sustained rhetoric. Even when Pope condescends — and he condescends

much too often—to pelt his antagonists with mere filth, he does it with a touch of boisterous vigour. He laughs out. He catches something from his patron Swift when he

> Laughs and shakes in Rabelais's easy chair.

His lungs seem to be fuller and his voice to lose for the time its tricks of mincing affectation. Here, indeed, there can be no question of insincerity. Pope's scorn of folly is to be condemned only so far as it was connected with too bitter a hatred of fools. He has suffered, as Swift foretold, by the insignificance of the enemies against whom he rages with superfluous vehemence. But for Pope, no one in this generation would have heard of Arnall, and Moore, and Breval, and Bezaleel Morris, and fifty more ephemeral denizens of Grub Street. The fault is, indeed, inherent in the plan. It is in some degree creditable to Pope that his satire was on the whole justified, so far as it could be justified, by the correctness of his judgment. The only great man whom he has seriously assaulted is Bentley; and to Pope, Bentley was of necessity not the greatest of classical critics, but the tasteless mutilator of Milton, and, as we must perhaps add, the object of the hatred of Pope's particular friends, Atterbury and Warburton. The misfortune is that the more just his satire, the

more perishable is its interest; and if we regard the *Dunciad* simply as an assault upon the vermin who then infested literature, we must consider him as a man who should use a steam-hammer to crack a flea. Unluckily for ourselves, however, it cannot be admitted so easily that Curll and Dennis and the rest had a merely temporary interest. Regarded as types of literary nuisances—and Pope does not condescend in his poetry, though the want is partly supplied in the notes, to indulge in much personal detail—they may be said by cynics to have a more enduring vitality. Of course there is at the present day no such bookseller as Curll, living by piratical invasions of established rights, and pandering to the worst passions of ignorant readers; no writer who could be fitly called, like Concanen

> A cold, long-winded native of the deep,

and fitly sentenced to dive where Fleet Ditch

> Rolls the large tribute of dead dogs to Thames;

and most certainly we must deny the present applicability of the note upon "Magazines" compiled by Pope, or rather by Warburton, for the episcopal bludgeon is perceptible in the prose description. They are not at present

> the eruption of every miserable scribbler, the scum

of every dirty newspaper, or fragments of fragments picked up from every dirty dunghill . . . equally the disgrace of human wit, morality, decency, and common sense.

But if the translator of the *Dunciad* into modern phraseology would have some difficulty in finding a head for every cap, there are perhaps some satirical stings which have not quite lost their point. The legitimate drama, so theatrical critics tell us, has not quite shaken off the rivalry of sensational scenery and idiotic burlesque, though possibly we do not produce absurdities equal to that which, as Pope tells us, was actually introduced by Theobald, in which

> Nile rises, Heaven descends, and dance on earth
> Gods, imps, and monsters, music, rage, and mirth,
> A fire, a jig, a battle and a ball,
> Till one wide conflagration swallows all.

There is still facetiousness which reminds us too forcibly that

> Gentle Dulness ever loves a joke,

and even sermons, for which we may apologise on the ground that

> Dulness is sacred in a sound divine.

Here and there, too, if we may trust certain stern

reviewers, there are writers who have learnt the principle that

> Index learning turns no student pale,
> Yet holds the eel of Science by the tail.

And the first four lines, at least, of the great prophecy at the conclusion of the third book is thought by the enemies of muscular Christianity to be possibly approaching its fulfilment:

> Proceed, great days! till learning fly the shore,
> Till birch shall blush with noble blood no more,
> Till Thames see Eton's sons for ever play,
> Till Westminster's whole year be holiday,
> Till Isis' elders reel, their pupils sport,
> And Alma Mater lies dissolved in Port!

No! So far as we can see, it is still true that

> Born a goddess, Dulness never dies.

Men, we know it on high authority, are still mostly fools. If Pope be in error, it is not so much that his adversary is beneath him, as that she is unassailable by wit or poetry. Weapons of the most ethereal temper spend their keenness in vain against the "anarch old" whose power lies in utter insensibility. It is fighting with a mist, and firing cannon-balls into a mudheap. As well rave against the force of gravitation, or complain that our gross bodies must be nourished by solid

food. If, however, we should be rather grateful than otherwise to a man who is sanguine enough to believe that satire can be successful against stupidity, and that Grub Street, if it cannot be exterminated, can at least be lashed into humility, we might perhaps complain that Pope has taken rather too limited a view of the subject. Dulness has other avatars besides the literary. In the last and finest book, Pope attempts to complete his plan by exhibiting the influence of dulness upon theology and science. The huge torpedo benumbs every faculty of the human mind, and paralyses all the Muses, except "mad Mathesis," which, indeed, does not carry on so internecine a war with the general enemy. The design is commendable, and executed, so far as Pope was on a level with his task, with infinite spirit. But, however excellent the poetry, the logic is defective, and the description of the evil inadequate. Pope has but a vague conception of the mode in which dulness might become the leading force in politics, lower religion till it became a mere cloak for selfishness, and make learning nothing but laborious and pedantic trifling. Had his powers been equal to his goodwill, we might have had a satire far more elevated than anything which he has attempted; for a man must be indeed a dull student of history who does not recognise the vast

influence of dulness-worship on the whole period which has intervened between Pope and ourselves. Nay, it may be feared that it will yet be some time before education bills and societies for university extension will have begun to dissipate the evil. A modern satirist, were satire still alive, would find an ample occupation for his talents in a worthy filling out of Pope's incomplete sketch. But though I feel, I must endeavour to resist the temptation of indicating some of the probable objects of his antipathy.

Pope's gallant assault on the common enemy indicates, meanwhile, his characteristic attitude. Pope is the incarnation of the literary spirit. He is the most complete representative in our language of the intellectual instincts which find their natural expression in pure literature, as distinguished from literature applied to immediate practical ends, or enlisted in the service of philosophy or science. The complete antithesis to that spirit is the evil principle which Pope attacks as dulness. This false goddess is the literary Ahriman; and Pope's natural antipathies, exaggerated by his personal passions and weaknesses to extravagant proportions, express themselves fully in his great mock-epic. His theory may be expressed in a parody of Nelson's immortal advice to his midshipmen: "Be an honest man and hate dulness as

you do the devil." Dulness generates the asphyxiating atmosphere in which no true literature can thrive. It oppresses the lungs and irritates the nerves of men whose keen, brilliant intellects mark them as the natural servants of literature. Seen from this point of view, there is an honourable completeness in Pope's career. Possibly a modern subject of literature may, without paradox, express a certain gratitude to Pope for a virtue which he would certainly be glad to imitate. Pope was the first man who made an independence by literature. First and last, he seems to have received over 8,000*l.* for his translation of Homer, a sum then amply sufficient to enable him to live in comfort. No sum at all comparable to this was ever received by a poet or novelist until the era of Scott and Byron. Now, without challenging admiration for Pope on the simple ground that he made his fortune, it is difficult to exaggerate the importance of this feat at the time. A contemporary who, whatever his faults, was a still more brilliant example than Pope of the purely literary qualities, suggests a curious parallel. Voltaire, as he tells us, was so weary of the humiliations that dishonour letters, that to stay his disgust he resolved to make "what scoundrels call a great fortune." Some of Voltaire's means of reaching this end appear to have been more

questionable than Pope's. But both of these men of genius early secured their independence by raising themselves permanently above the need of writing for money. It may be added in passing that there is a curious similarity in intellect and character between Pope and Voltaire which would on occasion be worth fuller exposition. The use, too, which Pope made of his fortune was thoroughly honourable. We scarcely give due credit, as a rule, to the man who has the rare merit of distinctly recognising his true vocation in life, and adhering to it with unflinching pertinacity. Probably the fact that such virtue generally brings a sufficient personal reward in this world seems to dispense with the necessity of additional praise. But call it a virtuous or merely a useful quality, we must at least admit that it is the necessary groundwork of a thoroughly satisfactory career. Pope, who, from his infancy, had

> Lisped in numbers, for the numbers came,

gained by his later numbers a secure position, and used his position to go on rhyming to the end of his life. He never failed to do his very best. He regarded the wealth which he had earned as a retaining fee, not as a discharge from his duties. Comparing him with his contemporaries, we see how vast was the advantage. Elevated above

Grub Street, he had no temptation to manufacture rubbish or descend to actual meanness like De Foe. Independent of patronage, he was not forced to become a "tame cat" in the hands of a duchess, like his friend Gay. Standing apart from politics, he was free from those disappointed pangs which contributed to the embitterment of the later years of Swift, dying "like a poisoned rat in a hole;" he had not, like Bolingbroke, to affect a philosophical contempt for the game in which he could no longer take a part; nor was he even, like Addison and Steele, induced to "give up to party what was meant for mankind." He was not a better man than some of these, and certainly not better than Goldsmith and Johnson in the succeeding generation. Yet, when we think of the amount of good intellect that ran to waste in the purlieus of Grub Street, or in hunting for pensions in ministerial ante-chambers, we feel a certain gratitude to the one literary magnate of the century, whose devotion, it is true, had a very tangible reward, but whose devotion was yet continuous, and free from any distractions but those of a constitutional irritability. Nay, if we compare Pope to some of the later writers who have wrung still princelier rewards from fortune, the result is not unfavourable. If Scott had been as true to his calling, his life, so far superior to Pope's

in most other respects, would not have presented the melancholy contrast of genius running to waste in desperate attempts to win money at the cost of worthier fame.

Pope, as a Roman Catholic, and as the adherent of a defeated party, had put himself out of the race for pecuniary reward. His loyal adherence to his friends, though, like all his virtues, subject to some deduction, is really a touching feature in his character. His Catholicism was of the most nominal kind. He adhered in name to a depressed Church chiefly because he could not bear to give pain to the parents whom he loved with an exquisite tenderness. Granting that he would not have had much chance of winning tangible rewards by the baseness of a desertion, he at least recognised his true position; and instead of being soured by his exclusion from the general competition, or wasting his life in frivolous regrets, he preserved a spirit of tolerance and independence, and had a full right to the boasts in which he certainly indulged a little too freely:

> Not Fortune's worshipper, nor Fashion's fool,
> Not Lucre's madman, nor Ambition's tool;
> Not proud, nor servile—be one poet's praise
> That, if he pleased, he pleased by manly ways;
> That flattery, even to kings, he held a shame,
> And thought a lie in prose or verse the same.

Admitting that the last line suggests a slight qualm, the portrait suggested in the rest is about as faithful as one can expect a man to paint from himself.

And hence we come to the question, what was the morality which Pope dispensed from this exalted position? Admitting his independence, can we listen to him patiently when he proclaims himself to be

> Of virtue only, and her friends, the friend;

or when he boasts in verses noble if quite sincere—

> Yes, I am proud; I must be proud to see
> Men not afraid of God, afraid of me;
> Safe from the Bar, the Pulpit, and the Throne,
> Yet touched and shamed by ridicule alone.

Is this guardian of virtue quite immaculate, and the morality which he preaches quite of the most elevated kind? We must admit, of course, that he does not sound the depths, or soar to the heights, in which men of loftier genius are at home. He is not a mystic, but a man of the world. He never, as we have already said, quits the sphere of ordinary and rather obvious maxims about the daily life of society, or quits it at his peril. His independence is not like Milton's, that of an ancient prophet, consoling himself by celestial visions for a world given over to baseness and

frivolity; nor like Shelley's, that of a vehement revolutionist, who has declared open war against the existing order; it is the independence of a modern gentleman, with a competent fortune, enjoying a time of political and religious calm. And therefore his morality is in the main the expression of the conclusions reached by supreme good sense, or, as he puts it,

> Good sense, which only is the gift of heaven,
> And though no science, fairly worth the seven.

Good sense is one of the excellent qualities to which we are scarcely inclined to do justice at the present day; it is the guide of a time of equilibrium, stirred by no vehement gales of passion, and we lose sight of it just when it might give us some useful advice. A man in a passion is never more irritated than when advised to be sensible; and at the present day we are permanently in a passion, and therefore apt to assert that, not only for a moment, but as a general rule, men do well to be angry. Our art critics, for example, are never satisfied with their frame of mind till they have lashed themselves into a fit of rhetoric. Nothing more is wanted to explain why we are apt to be dissatisfied with Pope, both as a critic and a moralist. In both capacities, however, Pope is really admirable. Nobody, for example,

has ridiculed more happily the absurdities of which we sometimes take him to be a representative. The recipe for making an epic poem is a perfect burlesque upon the pseudo-classicism of his time. He sees the absurdity of the contemporary statues, whose grotesque medley of ancient and modern costume is recalled in the lines—

> That livelong wig, which Gorgon's self might own,
> Eternal buckle takes in Parian stone.

The painters and musicians come in for their share of ridicule, as in the description of Timon's Chapel, where

> Light quirks of music, broken and uneven,
> Make the soul dance upon a jig to heaven;
> On painted ceilings you devoutly stare,
> Where sprawl the saints of Verrio and Laguerre.

Pope, again, was one of the first, by practice and precept, to break through the old formal school of gardening, in which

> No pleasing intricacies intervene,
> No artful wildness to perplex the scene;
> Grove nods at grove, each alley has a brother,
> And half the platform just reflects the other.
> The suffering eye inverted Nature sees,
> Trees cut to statues, statues thick as trees,
> With here a fountain never to be played,
> And there a summer-house that knows no shade;

> Here Amphitrite sails through myrtle bowers,
> There gladiators fight or die in flowers;
> Unwatered see the drooping sea-horse mourn,
> And swallows roost in Nilus' dusty urn.

It would be impossible to hit off more happily the queer formality which annoys us, unless its quaintness makes us smile, in the days of good Queen Anne, when Cato still appeared with a

> Long wig, flowered gown, and lacquered chair.

Pope's literary criticism, too, though verging too often on the commonplace, is generally sound as far as it goes. If, as was inevitable, he was blind to the merits of earlier schools of poetry, he was yet amongst the first writers who helped to establish the rightful supremacy of Shakespeare.

But in what way does Pope apply his good sense to morality? His favourite doctrine about human nature is expressed in the theory of the "ruling passion" which is to be found in all men, and which, once known, enables us to unravel the secret of every character. As he says in the *Essay on Man*—

> On life's vast ocean diversely we sail,
> Reason the card, but passion is the gale.

Right reason, therefore, is the power which directs

passions to the worthiest end; and its highest lesson is to enforce

> The truth (enough for man to know)
> Virtue alone is happiness below.

The truth, though admirable, may be suspected of commonplace; and Pope does not lay down any propositions unfamiliar to other moralists, nor, it is to be feared, enforce them by preaching of more than usual effectiveness. His denunciations of avarice, of corruption, and of sensuality were probably of little more practical use than his denunciation of dulness. The "men not afraid of God" were hardly likely to be deterred from selling their votes to Walpole by fear of Pope's satire. He might

> Goad the Prelate slumbering in his stall

sufficiently to produce the episcopal equivalent for bad language; but he would hardly interrupt the bishop's slumbers for many moments; and, on the whole, he might congratulate himself, rather too cheaply, on being animated by

> The strong antipathy of good to bad.

Without exaggerating its importance, however, we may seek to define the precise point on which Pope's morality differed from that of many other writers who have expressed their general approval

of the ten commandments. A healthy strain of moral feeling is useful, though we cannot point to the individuals whom it has restrained from picking pockets.

The defective side of the morality of good sense is, that it tends to degenerate into cynicism, either of the indolent variety which commended itself to Chesterfield, or of the more vehement sort, of which Swift's writings are the most powerful embodiment. A shrewd man of the world, of placid temperament, accepts placidly the conclusion that as he can see through a good many people, virtue generally is a humbug. If he has grace enough left to be soured by such a conclusion, he raves at the universal corruption of mankind. Now Pope, notwithstanding his petty spite, and his sympathy with the bitterness of his friends, always shows a certain tenderness of nature which preserves him from sweeping cynicism. He really believes in nature, and values life for the power of what Johnson calls reciprocation of benevolence. The beauty of his affection for his father and mother, and for his old nurse, breaks pleasantly through the artificial language of his letters, like a sweet spring in barren ground. When he touches upon the subject in his poetry, one seems to see tears in his eyes, and to hear his voice tremble. There is no more beautiful passage in

his writings than the one in which he expresses the hope that he may be spared

> To rock the cradle of reposing age,
> With lenient arts extend a mother's breath,
> Make languor smile, and smooth the bed of death;
> Explore the thought, explain the asking eye,
> And keep awhile one parent from the sky.

Here at least he is sincere beyond suspicion; and we know from unimpeachable testimony that the sentiment so perfectly expressed was equally exemplified in his life. It sounds easy, but unfortunately the ease is not always proved in practice, for a man of genius to be throughout their lives an unmixed comfort to his parents. It is unpleasant to remember that a man so accessible to tender emotions should jar upon us by his language about women generally. Byron countersigns the opinion of Bolingbroke that he knew the sex well; but testimony of that kind hardly prepossesses us in his favour. In fact, the school of Bolingbroke and Swift, to say nothing of Wycherley, was hardly calculated to generate a chivalrous tone of feeling. His experience of Lady Mary gave additional bitterness to his sentiments. Pope, in short, did not love good women—

> Matter too soft a lasting mark to bear,
> And best distinguished as black, brown, or fair,

as he impudently tells a lady—as a man of genius

ought; and women have generally returned the dislike. Meanwhile the vein of benevolence shows itself unmistakably in Pope's language about his friends. Thackeray seizes upon this point of his character in his lectures on the English Humourists, and his powerful, if rather too favourable, description brings out forcibly the essential tenderness of the man who, during the lucid intervals of his last illness, was "always saying something kindly of his present or absent friends." Nobody, as has often been remarked, has paid so many exquisitely turned compliments. There is something which rises to the dog-like in his affectionate admiration for Swift and for Bolingbroke, his rather questionable "guide, philosopher, and friend." Whenever he speaks of a friend, he is sure to be felicitous. There is Garth, for example:

> The best good Christian he,
> Although he knows it not.

There are beautiful lines upon Arbuthnot, addressed as—

> Friend to my life, which did not you prolong,
> The world had wanted many an idle song.

Or we may quote, though one verse has been spoilt by familiarity, the lines in which Bolingbroke is coupled with Peterborough:

> There St. John mingles with my friendly bowl

The feast of reason and the flow of soul;
And he whose lightning pierced the Iberian lines
Now farms my quincunx, and now ranks my vines,
And tames the genius of the stubborn plain
Almost as quickly as he conquered Spain.

Or again, there are the verses in which he anticipates the dying words attributed to Pitt:

And you, brave Cobham, to the latest breath,
Shall feel the ruling passion strong in death;
Such in those moments, as in all the past,
"Oh, save my country, Heaven!" shall be your last.

Cobham's name, again, suggests the spirited lines—

Spirit of Arnall! aid me while I lie,
Cobham's a coward, Polwarth is a slave,
And Lyttelton a dark, designing knave;
St. John has ever been a wealthy fool—
But let me add Sir Robert's mighty dull,
Has never made a friend in private life,
And was, besides, a tyrant to his wife.

Perhaps the last compliment is ambiguous, but Walpole's name again reminds us that Pope could on occasion be grateful even to an opponent. "Go see Sir Robert," suggests his friend in the epilogue to the Satires; and Pope replies:

Seen him I have; but in his happier hour
Of social pleasure, ill exchanged for power;

Seen him uncumbered with the venal tribe
Smile without art, and win without a bribe;
Would he oblige me? Let me only find
He does not think me what he thinks mankind;
Come, come; at all I laugh, he laughs no doubt;
The only difference is, I dare laugh out.

But there is no end to the delicate flattery which may be set off against Pope's ferocious onslaughts upon his enemies. If one could have a wish for the asking, one could scarcely ask for a more agreeable sensation than that of being titillated by a man of equal ingenuity in caressing one's pet vanities. The art of administering such consolation is possessed only by men who unite such tenderness to an exquisitely delicate intellect. This vein of genuine feeling sufficiently redeems Pope's writings from the charge of a commonplace worldliness. Certainly he is not one of the "genial" school, whose indiscriminate benevolence exudes over all that they touch. There is nothing mawkish in his philanthropy. Pope was, if anything, too good a hater; "the portentous cub never forgives," said Bentley; but kindliness is all the more impressive when not too widely diffused. Add to this his hearty contempt for pomposities, humbugs, and stupidities of all kinds, and above all the fine spirit of independence, in which we have again the real

man, and which expresses itself in such lines as these:

> Oh, let me live my own, and die so too!
> (To live and die is all I have to do);
> Maintain a poet's dignity and ease,
> And see what friends and read what books I please.

And we may admit that Pope, in spite of his wig and his stays, his vanities and his affectations, was in his way as fair an embodiment as we would expect of that "plain living and high thinking" of which Wordsworth regretted the disappearance. The little cripple, diseased in mind and body, spiteful and occasionally brutal, had in him the spirit of a man. The monarch of the literary world was far from immaculate; but he was not without a dignity of his own.

We come, however, to the question, what had Pope to say upon the deepest subjects with which human beings can concern themselves? The most explicit answer must be taken from the *Essay on Man*, and the essay must be acknowledged to have more conspicuous faults than any of Pope's writings. The art of reasoning in verse is so difficult that we may doubt whether it is in any case legitimate, and must acknowledge that it has been never successfully practised by any English writer. Dryden's *Religio Laici* may be better

reasoning, but it is worse poetry than Pope's Essay. It is true, again, that Pope's reasoning is intrinsically feeble. He was no metaphysician, and confined himself to putting together incoherent scraps of different systems. Some of his arguments strike us as simply childish, as, for example, the quibble derived from the Stoics, that

> The blest to-day is as completely so
> As who began a thousand years ago.

Nobody, we may safely say, was ever much comforted by that reflection. Nor, though the celebrated argument about the scale of beings, which Pope but half understood, was then sanctioned by the most eminent contemporary names, do we derive any deep consolation from the remark that

> in the scale of reasoning life, 't is plain,
> There must be somewhere such a rank as man.

To say no more of these frigid conceits, as they now appear to us, Pope does not maintain the serious temper which befits a man pondering upon the deep mysteries of the universe. Religious meditation does not harmonise with epigrammatical satire. Admitting the value of the reflection that other beings besides man are fitting objects of the Divine benevolence, we are jarred by such a discord as this:

> While man exclaims, See all things for my use!
> See man for mine! replies a pampered goose.

The goose is appropriate enough in Charron or Montaigne, but should be kept out of poetry. Such a shock, too, follows when Pope talks about the superior beings who

Showed a Newton as we show an ape.

Did anybody, again, ever complain that he wanted "the strength of bulls, the fur of bears?" [1] Or could it be worth while to meet his complaints in a serious poem? Pope, in short, is not merely a bad reasoner, but he wants that deep moral earnestness which gives a profound interest to Johnson's satires—the best productions of his school—and the deeply pathetic religious feeling of Cowper.

Admitting all this, however, and more, the *Essay on Man* still contains many passages which not only testify to the unequalled skill of this great artist in words, but show a certain moral dignity. In the Essay, more than in any of his other writings, we have the difficulty of separating the solid bullion from the dross. Pope is here pre-eminently parasitical, and it is possible to trace to other writers, such as Montaigne, Pascal, Leibniz, Shaftesbury, Locke, and Wollaston, as

[1] The remark was perhaps taken from Sir Thomas Browne: "Thus have we no just quarrel with nature for leaving us naked; or to envy the horns, hoofs, skins, and furs of other creatures; being provided with reason that can supply them all."—*Religio Medici*, Part I, sec. 18.

well as to the inspiration of Bolingbroke, nearly every argument which he employs. He unfortunately worked up the rubbish as well as the gems. When Mr. Ruskin says that his "theology was two centuries in advance of his time," the phrase is curiously inaccurate. He was not really in advance of the best men of his own time; but they, it is to be feared, were considerably in advance of the average opinion of our own. What may be said with more plausibility is, that whilst Pope frequently wastes his skill in gilding refuse, he is really most sensitive to the noblest sentiments of his contemporaries, and that, when he has good materials to work upon, his verse glows with unusual fervour, often to sink with unpleasant rapidity into mere quibbling or epigrammatic pungency. The real truth is that Pope precisely expresses the position of the best thinkers of his day. He did not understand the reasoning, but he fully shared the sentiments of the philosophers among whom Locke and Leibniz were the great lights. Pope is to the deists and semi-deists of his time what Milton was to the Puritans or Dante to the Schoolmen. At times he writes like a Pantheist, and then becomes orthodox, without a consciousness of the transition; he is a believer in universal predestination, and saves himself by inconsistent language about "leaving free the

human will;" his views about the origin of society are an inextricable mass of inconsistency; and he may be quoted in behalf of doctrines which he, with the help of Warburton, vainly endeavoured to disavow. But, leaving sound divines to settle the question of his orthodoxy, and metaphysicians to crush his arguments, if they think it worth while, we are rather concerned with the general temper in which he regards the universe, and the moral which he draws for his own edification. The main doctrine which he enforces is, of course, one of his usual commonplaces. The statement that "whatever is, is right," may be verbally admitted, and strained to different purposes by half a dozen differing schools. It may be alleged by the cynic, who regards virtue as an empty name; by the mystic, who is lapped in heavenly contemplation from the cares of this troublesome world; by the sceptic, whose whole wisdom is concentrated in the duty of submitting to the inevitable; or by the man who, abandoning the attempt of solving inscrutable enigmas, is content to recognise in everything the hand of a Divine ordainer of all things. Pope, judging him by his most forcible passages, prefers to insist upon the inevitable ignorance of man in presence of the Infinite:

'T is but a part we see, and not the whole;

and any effort to pierce the impenetrable gloom can only end in disappointment and discontent:

> In pride, in reasoning pride, our error lies.

We think that we can judge the ways of the Almighty, and correct the errors of His work. We are as incapable of accounting for human wickedness as for plague, tempest, and earthquake. In each case our highest wisdom is an humble confession of ignorance; or, as he puts it,

> In both, to reason right is to submit.

This vein of thought might, perhaps, have conducted him to the scepticism of his master, Bolingbroke. He unluckily fills up the gaps of his logical edifice with the untempered mortar of obsolete metaphysics, long since become utterly uninteresting to all men. Admitting that he cannot explain, he tries to manufacture sham explanations out of the "scale of beings," and other scholastic rubbish. But, in a sense, too, the most reverent minds will agree most fully with Pope's avowal of the limitation of human knowledge. He does not apply his scepticism or his humility to stimulate to vain repining against the fetters with which our minds are bound, or an angry denunciation, like that of Bolingbroke, of the solutions in which other souls have found a

sufficient refuge. The perplexity in which he finds himself generates a spirit of resignation and tolerance.

> Hope humbly, then; with trembling pinions soar;
> Wait the great teacher, Death, and God adore.

That is the pith of his teaching. All optimism is apt to be a little irritating to men whose sympathies with human suffering are unusually strong; and the optimism of a man like Pope, vivacious rather than profound in his thoughts and his sympathies, annoys us at times by his calm complacency. We cannot thrust aside so easily the thought of the heavy evils under which all creation groans. But we should wrong him by a failure to recognise the real benevolence of his sentiment. Pope indeed becomes too pantheistic for some tastes in the celebrated fragment—the whole poem is a conglomerate of slightly connected fragments—beginning,

> All are but parts of one stupendous whole,
> Whose body Nature is, and God the soul.

But his real fault is that he is not consistently pantheistic. Pope was attacked both for his pantheism and fatalism and for having borrowed from Bolingbroke. It is curious enough that it was precisely these doctrines which he did not

borrow. Bolingbroke, like most feeble reasoners, believed firmly in Free Will; and though a theist after a fashion, his religion had not emotional depth or logical coherence enough to be pantheistic. Pope, doubtless, did not here quit his master's guidance from any superiority in logical perception. But he did occasionally feel the poetical value of the pantheistic conception of the universe. Pantheism, in fact, is the only poetical form of the metaphysical theology current in Pope's day. The old historical theology of Dante, or even of Milton, was too faded for poetical purposes; and the "personal Deity," whose existence and attributes were proved by the elaborate reasonings of the apologists of that day, was unfitted for poetical celebration by the very fact that his existence required proof. Poetry deals with intuitions, not with remote inferences, and therefore in his better moments Pope spoke not of the intelligent moral Governor discovered by philosophical investigation, but of the Divine Essence immanent in all nature, whose "living raiment" is the world. The finest passages in the *Essay on Man*, like the finest passages in Wordsworth, are an attempt to expound that view, though Pope falls back too quickly into epigram, as Wordsworth into prose. It was reserved for Goethe to show what a poet might learn from the philosophy

of Spinoza. Meanwhile Pope, uncertain as is his grasp of any philosophical conceptions, shows, not merely in set phrases, but in the general colouring of his poem, something of that width of sympathy which should result from the pantheistic view. The tenderness, for example, with which he always speaks of the brute creation is pleasant in a writer so little distinguished as a rule by an interest in what we popularly call nature. The "scale of being" argument may be illogical, but we pardon it when it is applied to strengthen our sympathies with our unfortunate dependants on the lower steps of the ladder. The lamb who

> Licks the hand just raised to shed his blood

is a second-hand lamb, and has, like so much of Pope's writing, acquired a certain tinge of banality, which must limit quotation; and the same must be said of the poor Indian, who

> thinks, admitted to that equal sky,
> His faithful dog will bear him company.

But the sentiment is as right as the language (in spite of its familiarity we can still recognise the fact) is exquisite. Tolerance of all forms of faith, from that of the poor Indian upwards, is so characteristic of Pope as to have offended some modern critics who might have known better. We may pick holes in the celebrated antithesis:

> For forms of government let fools contest:
> Whate'er is best administered is best;
> For forms of faith let graceless zealots fight,
> He can't be wrong whose life is in the right.

Certainly, they are not mathematically accurate formulæ; but they are generous, if imperfect, statements of great truths, and not unbecoming in the mouth of the man who, as the member of an unpopular sect, learnt to be cosmopolitan rather than bitter, and expressed his convictions in the well-known words addressed to Swift: "I am of the religion of Erasmus, a Catholic; so I live, so I shall die; and hope one day to meet you, Bishop Atterbury, the younger Craggs, Dr. Garth, Dean Berkeley, and Mr. Hutchinson in heaven." Who would wish to shorten the list? And the scheme of morality which Pope deduced for practical guidance in life is in harmony with the spirit which breathes in those words just quoted. A recent dispute in a court of justice shows that even our most cultivated men have forgotten Pope so far as to be ignorant of the source of the familiar words—

> What can ennoble sots, or slaves, or cowards?
> Alas! not all the blood of all the Howards.

It is therefore necessary to say explicitly that the poem where they occur, the fourth epistle of the

*Essay on Man*, not only contains half a dozen other phrases equally familiar—*e. g.*, "An honest man's the noblest work of God;"[1] "Looks through nature up to nature's God;" "From grave to gay, from lively to severe"—but breathes throughout sentiments which it would be credulous to believe that any man could express so vigorously without feeling profoundly. Mr. Ruskin has quoted one couplet as giving "the most complete, the most concise, and the most lofty expression of moral temper existing in English words"—

> Never elated, while one man 's oppressed;
> Never dejected, whilst another 's blessed.

[1] This sentiment, by the way, was attacked by Darnley, in his edition of Beaumont and Fletcher, as "false and degrading to man, derogatory to God." As I have lately seen the remark quoted with approbation, it is worth noticing the argument by which Darnley supports it. He says that an honest able man is nobler than an honest man, and Aristides with the genius of Homer nobler than Aristides with the dulness of a clown. Undoubtedly! But surely a man might say that English poetry is the noblest in the world, and yet admit that Shakespeare was a nobler poet than Tom Moore. Because honesty is nobler than any other quality, it does not follow that all honest men are on a par. This bit of cavilling reminds one of De Quincey's elaborate argument against the lines:

> Who would not laugh, if such a man there be?
> Who would not weep, if Atticus were he?

De Quincey says that precisely the same phenomenon is supposed to make you laugh in one line and weep in the other; and that therefore the thought is inaccurate. As if it would not be a fit cause for tears to discover that one of our national idols was a fitting subject for laughter!

The passage in which they occur is worthy of this (let us admit, just a little over-praised) sentiment; and leads not unfitly to the conclusion and summary of the whole, that he who can recognise the beauty of virtue knows that

> Where Faith, Law, Morals, all began,
> All end—in love of God and love of man.

I know but too well all that may be said against this view of Pope's morality. He is, as Sainte-Beuve says, the easiest of all men to caricature; and it is equally easy to throw cold water upon his morality. We may count up his affectations, ridicule his platitudes, make heavy deductions for his insincerity, denounce his too frequent indulgence in a certain love of dirt, which he shares with, and in which indeed he is distanced by, Swift; and decline to believe in the virtue, or even in the love of virtue, of a man stained by so many vices and weaknesses. Yet I must decline to believe that men can gather grapes off thorns, or figs off thistles, or noble expressions of moral truth from a corrupt heart thinly varnished by a coating of affectation. Turn it how we may, the thing is impossible. Pope was more than a mere literary artist, though he was an artist of unparalleled excellence in his own department. He was a

man in whom there was the seed of many good thoughts, though choked in their development by the growth of innumerable weeds. And I will venture, in conclusion, to adduce one more proof of the justice of a lenient verdict. I have had already to quote many phrases familiar to every one who is tinctured in the slightest degree with a knowledge of English literature; and yet have been haunted by a dim suspicion that some of my readers may have been surprised to recognise their author. Pope, we have seen, is recognised even by judges of the land only through the medium of Byron; and therefore the *Universal Prayer* may possibly be unfamiliar to some readers. If so, it will do them no harm to read over again a few of its verses. Perhaps, after that experience, they will admit that the little cripple of Twickenham, distorted as were his instincts after he had been stretched on the rack of this rough world, and grievous as were his offences against the laws of decency and morality, had yet in him a noble strain of eloquence significant of deep religious sentiment. A phrase in the first stanza may shock us as bordering too closely on the epigrammatic; but the whole poem from which I take these stanzas must, I think, be recognised as the utterance of a tolerant, reverent, and kindly heart:

Father of all! in every age,
In every clime adored,
By saint, by savage, and by sage—
Jehovah, Jove, or Lord!

Thou great First Cause, least understood,
Who all my sense confined
To know but this, that thou art good,
And that myself am blind.

. . . . . .

What conscience dictates to be done,
Or warns me not to do,
This, teach me more than hell to shun;
That, more than heaven pursue.

What blessings thy free bounty gives
Let me not cast away;
For God is paid when man receives—
To enjoy is to obey.

Yet not to earth's contracted span
Thy goodness let me bound,
Or think thee Lord alone of man,
When thousand worlds are round.

Let not this weak, unknowing hand
Presume thy bolts to throw,
Or deal damnation round the land
On each I judge thy foe.

If I am right, thy grace impart
Still in the right to stay:
If I am wrong, oh, teach my heart
To find that better way.

. . . . . .

These stanzas, I am well aware, do not quite conform to the modern taste in hymns, nor are they likely to find favour with admirers of the *Christian Year*. Another school would object to them on a very different ground. The deism of Pope's day was not a stable form of belief; but in the form in which it was held by the pure deists of the Toland and Tindal school, or by the disguised deists who followed Locke or Clarke, it was the highest creed then attainable; and Pope's prayer is an adequate impression of its best sentiment.

# Sir Walter Scott

The question has begun to be asked about Scott which is asked about every great man: whether he is still read or still read as he ought to be read. I have been glad to see in some statistics of popular literature that the Waverley Novels are still among the books most frequently bought at railway stations, and scarcely surpassed even by *Pickwick* or *David Copperfield*. A writer, it is said, is entitled to be called a classic when his books have been read for a century after his death. The number of books which fairly satisfies that condition is remarkably small. There are certain books, of course, which we are all bound to read if we make any claim to be decently educated. A modern Englishman cannot afford to confess that he has not read Shakespeare or Milton; if he talks about philosophy, he must have dipped at least into Bacon and Hobbes and Locke; if he is a literary critic, he must know something of Spenser and Donne and Dryden and the early dramatists; but how many books are

there of the seventeenth century which are still read for pleasure by other than specialists? To speak within bounds, I fancy that it would be exceedingly difficult to make out a list of one hundred English books which after publication for a century are still really familiar to the average reader. Something like ninty-nine of those have in any case lost the charm of novelty, and are read, if read at all, from some vague impression that the reader is doing a duty. It takes a very powerful voice and a very clear utterance to make a man audible to the fourth generation. If something of the mildew of time is stealing over the Waverley Novels, we must regard that as all but inevitable. Scott will have succeeded beyond any but the very greatest, perhaps even as much as the very greatest, if, in the twentieth century, now so unpleasantly near, he has a band of faithful followers, who still read because they like to read and not because they are told to read. Admitting that he must more or less undergo the universal fate, that the glory must be dimmed even though it be not quenched, we may still ask whether he will not retain as much vitality as the conditions of humanity permit: Will our posterity understand at least why he was once a luminary of the first magnitude, or wonder at their ancestors' hallucination about a mere will-o'-the-wisp?

Will some of his best performances stand out like a cathedral amongst ruined hovels, or will they all sink into the dust together, and the outlines of what once charmed the world be traced only by Dryasdust and historians of literature? It is a painful task to examine such questions impartially. This probing a great reputation, and doubting whether we can come to anything solid at the bottom, is especially painful in regard to Scott. For he has, at least, this merit, that he is one of those rare natures for whom we feel not merely admiration but affection. We may cherish the fame of some writers in spite of, not on account of, many personal defects; if we satisfied ourselves that their literary reputations were founded on the sand, we might partly console ourselves with the thought that we were only depriving bad men of a title to genius. But for Scott most men feel in even stronger measure that kind of warm fraternal regard which Macaulay and Thackeray expressed for the amiable, but, perhaps, rather cold-blooded, Addison. The manliness and the sweetness of the man's nature predispose us to return the most favourable verdict in our power. And we may add that Scott is one of the last great English writers whose influence extended beyond his island, and gave a stimulus to the development of European thought. We

cannot afford to surrender our faith in one to whom, whatever his permanent merits, we must trace so much that is characteristic of the mind of the nineteenth century. Whilst, finally, if we have any Scotch blood in our veins, we must be more or less than men to turn a deaf ear to the promptings of patriotism. When Shakespeare's fame decays everywhere else, the inhabitants of Stratford-on-Avon, if it still exist, should still revere their tutelary saint; and the old town of Edinburgh should tremble in its foundation when a sacrilegious hand is laid upon the glory of Scott.

Let us, however, take courage, and, with such impartiality as we may possess, endeavour to sift the wheat from the chaff. And, by way of following an able guide, let us dwell for a little on the judgment pronounced upon Scott by one whose name I would never mention without profound respect, and who has a special claim to be heard in this case. Carlyle is (I must now say was) both a man of genius and a Scotchman. His own writings show in every line that he comes of the same strong Protestant race from which Scott received his best qualities.

The Scotch national character [says Carlyle himself] originates in many circumstances. First of all, the Saxon stuff there was to work on; but next, and beyond all else except that, in the Presbyterian gos-

pel of John Knox. It seems a good national character, and, on some sides, not so good. Let Scott thank John Knox, for he owed him much, little as he dreamed of debt in that quarter. No Scotchman of his time was more entirely Scotch than Walter Scott: the good and the not so good, which all Scotchmen inherit, ran through every fibre of him.

Nothing more true; and the words would be as strikingly appropriate if for Walter Scott we substitute Thomas Carlyle. And to this source of sympathy we might add others. Who in this generation could rival Scott's talent for the picturesque, unless it be Carlyle? Who has done so much to apply the lesson which Scott, as he says, first taught us—that the "bygone ages of the world were actually filled by living men, not by protocols, state-papers, controversies, and abstractions of men"? If Scott would in old days—I still quote his critic—have harried cattle in Tynedale or cracked crowns in Redswire, would not Carlyle have thundered from the pulpit of John Knox his own gospel, only in slightly altered phraseology—that shams should not live but die, and that men should do what work lies nearest to their hands, as in the presence of the eternities and the infinite silences?

The last parallel reminds us that if there are points of similarity, there are contrasts both wide

and deep. The rugged old apostle had probably a very low opinion of moss-troopers, and Carlyle has a message to deliver to his fellow-creatures, which is not quite according to Scott. And thus we see throughout his interesting essay a kind of struggle between two opposite tendencies—a genuine liking for the man, tempered by a sense that Scott dealt rather too much in those same shams to pass muster with a stern moral censor. Nobody can touch Scott's character more finely. There is a charming little anecdote which every reader must remember: how there was a "little Blenheim cocker" of singular sensibility and sagacity; how the said cocker would at times fall into musings like those of a Wertherean poet, and lived in perpetual fear of strangers, regarding them all as potentially dog-stealers; how the dog was, nevertheless, endowed with "most amazing moral tact," and specially hated the genus *quack*, and, above all, that of *acrid-quack*. "These," says Carlyle, "though never so clear-starched, bland-smiling, and beneficent, he absolutely would have no trade with. Their very sugar-cake was unavailing. He said with emphasis, as clearly as barking could say it, 'Acrid-quack, avaunt!'" But once when "a tall, irregular, busy-looking man came halting by," that wise, nervous little dog ran towards him, and began "fawning,

frisking, licking at the feet" of Sir Walter Scott. No reader of reviews could have done better, says Carlyle; and, indeed, that canine testimonial was worth having. I prefer that little anecdote even to Lockhart's account of the pig, which had a romantic affection for the author of *Waverley*. Its relater at least perceived and loved that unaffected benevolence, which invested even Scott's bodily presence with a kind of natural aroma, perceptible, as it would appear, to very far-away cousins. But Carlyle is on his guard, and though his sympathy flows kindly enough, it is rather harshly intercepted by his sterner mood. He cannot, indeed, but warm to Scott at the end. After touching on the sad scene of Scott's closing years, at once ennobled and embittered by that last desperate struggle to clear off the burden of debt, he concludes with genuine feeling.

> It can be said of Scott, when he departed he took a man's life along with him. No sounder piece of British manhood was put together in that eighteenth century of time. Alas, his fine Scotch face, with its shaggy honesty, sagacity, and goodness, when we saw it latterly on the Edinburgh streets, was all worn with care, the joy all fled from it, ploughed deep with labour and sorrow. We shall never forget it—we shall never see it again. Adieu, Sir Walter, pride of all Scotchmen; take our proud and sad farewell.

If even the Waverley Novels should lose their

interest, the last journals of Scott, recently published by a judicious editor, can never lose their interest as the record of one of the noblest struggles ever carried on by a great man to redeem a lamentable error. It is a book to do one good.

And now it is time to turn to the failings which, in Carlyle's opinion, mar this pride of all Scotchmen, and make his permanent reputation doubtful. The faults upon which he dwells are, of course, those which are more or less acknowledged by all sound critics. Scott, says Carlyle, had no great gospel to deliver; he had nothing of the martyr about him; he slew no monsters and stirred no deep emotions. He did not believe in anything, and did not even disbelieve in anything: he was content to take the world as it came—the false and the true mixed indistinguishably together. One Ram-dass, a Hindoo, "who set up for god-head lately," being asked what he meant to do with the sins of mankind, replied that "he had fire enough in his belly to burn up all the sins in the world." Ram-dass had "some spice of sense in him." Now, of fire of that kind we can detect few sparks in Scott. He was a thoroughly healthy, sound, vigorous Scotchman, with an eye for the main chance, but not much of an eye for the eternities. And that unfortunate commercial element, which caused the misery of his life, was

equally mischievous to his work. He cared for no results of his working but such as could be seen by the eye, and in one sense or other, "handled, looked at, and buttoned into the breeches' pocket." He regarded literature rather as a trade than an art; and literature, unless it is a very poor affair, should have higher aims than that of "harmlessly amusing indolent, languid men." Scott would not afford the time or the trouble to go to the root of the matter, and is content to amuse us with mere contrasts of costume, which will lose their interest when the swallow-tail is as obsolete as the buff-coat. And then he fell into the modern sin of extempore writing, and deluged the world with the first hasty overflowings of his mind, instead of straining and refining it till he could bestow the pure essence upon us. In short, his career is summed up in the phrase that it was "writing impromptu novels to buy farms with"—a melancholy end, truly, for a man of rare genius. Nothing is sadder than to hear of such a man "writing himself out;" and it is pitiable indeed that Scott should be the example of that fate which rises most naturally to our minds.

Something very perfect in its kind [says Carlyle] might have come from Scott, nor was it a low kind —nay, who knows how high, with studious self-concentration, he might have gone: what wealth nature

implanted in him, which his circumstances, most unkind while seeming to be kindest, had never impelled him to unfold?

There is undoubtedly some truth in the severer criticisms to which some more kindly sentences are a pleasant relief; but there is something too which most persons will be apt to consider as rather harsher than necessary. Is not the moral preacher intruding a little too much on the province of the literary critic? In fact we fancy that, in the midst of these energetic remarks, Carlyle is conscious of certain half-expressed doubts. The name of Shakespeare occurs several times in the course of his remarks, and suggests to us that we can hardly condemn Scott whilst acquitting the greatest name in our literature. Scott, it seems, wrote for money; he coined his brains into cash to buy farms. Did not Shakespeare do pretty much the same? As Carlyle himself puts it, "beyond drawing audiences to the Globe Theatre, Shakespeare contemplated no result in those plays of his." Shakespeare, as Pope puts it,

> Whom you and every playhouse bill
> Style the divine, the matchless, what you will,
> For gain, not glory, wing'd his roving flight,
> And grew immortal in his own despite.

To write for money was long held to be

disgraceful; and Byron, as we know, taunted Scott because his publishers combined

> To yield his muse just half-a-crown per line;

whilst Scott seems half to admit that his conduct required justification, and urges that he sacrificed to literature very fair chances in his original profession. Many people might, perhaps, be disposed to take a bolder line of defence. Cut out of English fiction all that which has owed its birth more or less to a desire of earning money honourably, and the residue would be painfully small. The truth, indeed, seems to be simple. No good work is done when the one impelling motive is the desire of making a little money; but some of the best work that has ever been done has been indirectly due to the impecuniosity of the labourers. When a man is empty he makes a very poor job of it, in straining colourless trash from his hardbound brains; but when his mind is full to bursting he may still require the spur of a moderate craving for cash to induce him to take the decisive plunge. Scott illustrates both cases. The melancholy drudgery of his later years was forced from him in spite of nature; but nobody ever wrote more spontaneously than Scott when he was composing his early poems and novels. If the precedent of Shakespeare is good

for anything, it is good for this. Shakespeare, it may be, had a more moderate ambition; but there seems to be no reason why the desire of a good house at Stratford should be intrinsically nobler than the desire of a fine estate at Abbotsford. But then, it is urged, Scott allowed himself to write with preposterous haste. And Shakespeare, who never blotted a line! What is the great difference between them? Mr. Carlyle feels that here too Scott has at least a very good precedent to allege; but he endeavours to establish a distinction. It was right, he says, for Shakespeare to write rapidly, "being ready to do it. And herein truly lies the secret of the matter; such swiftness of writing, after due energy of preparation, is, doubtless, the right method; the hot furnace having long worked and simmered, let the pure gold flow out at one gush." Could there be a better description of Scott in his earlier years? He published his first poem of any pretensions at thirty-four, an age which Shelley and Keats never reached, and which Byron only passed by two years. *Waverley* came out when he was forty-three—most of our modern novelists have written themselves out long before they arrive at that respectable period of life. From a child he had been accumulating the knowledge and the thoughts that at last found expression in

his work. He had been a teller of stories before he was well in breeches; and had worked hard till middle life in accumulating vast stores of picturesque imagery. The delightful notes to all his books give us some impression of the fulness of mind which poured forth a boundless torrent of anecdote to the guests at Abbotsford. We only repine at the prodigality of the harvest when we forget the long process of culture by which it was produced. And, more than this, when we look at the peculiar characteristics of Scott's style—that easy flow of narrative never heightening into epigram, and indeed, to speak the truth, full of slovenly blunders and amazing grammatical solecisms, but also always full of a charm of freshness and fancy most difficult to analyse—we may well doubt whether much labour would have improved or injured him. No man ever depended more on the perfectly spontaneous flow of his narratives. Carlyle quotes Schiller against him, amongst other and greater names. We need not attempt to compare the two men; but do not Schiller's tragedies smell rather painfully of the lamp? Does not the professor of æsthetics pierce a little too distinctly through the exterior of the poet? And, for one example, are not Schiller's excellent but remarkably platitudinous peasants in *William Tell* miserably colourless alongside of Scott's

rough border dalesmen, racy of speech, and redolent of their native soil in every word and gesture? To every man his method according to his talent. Scott is the most perfectly delightful of story-tellers, and it is the very essence of story-telling that it should not follow prescribed canons of criticism, but be as natural as the talk by fire-sides, and it is to be feared, over many gallons of whisky-toddy, of which it is, in fact, the refined essence. Scott skims off the cream of his varied stores of popular tradition and antiquarian learning with strange facility; but he had tramped through many a long day's march, and pored over innumerable ballads and forgotten writers, before he had anything to skim. Had he not—if we may use the word without offence—been cramming all his life, and practising the art of story-telling every day he lived? Probably the most striking incidents of his books are in reality mere modifications of anecdotes which he had rehearsed a hundred times before, just disguised enough to fit into his story. Who can read, for example, the inimitable legend of the blind piper in *Redgauntlet* without seeing that it bears all the marks of long elaboration as clearly as one of those discourses of Whitfield, which, by constant repetition, became marvels of dramatic art? He was an impromptu composer, in the sense that when his

anecdotes once reached paper, they flowed rapidly, and were little corrected; but the correction must have been substantially done in many cases long before they appeared in the state of "copy."

Let us, however, pursue the indictment a little further. Scott did not believe in anything in particular. Yet once more, did Shakespeare? There is surely a poetry of doubt as well as a poetry of conviction, or what shall we say to *Hamlet*? Appearing in such an age as the end of the last and the beginning of this century, Scott could but share the intellectual atmosphere in which he was born, and at that day, whatever we may think of this, few people had any strong faith to boast of. Why should not a poet stand aside from the chaos of conflicting opinions, so far as he was able to extricate himself from the unutterable confusion around them, and show us what was beautiful in the world as he saw it, without striving to combine the office of prophet with his more congenial occupation? Carlyle did not mean to urge so feeble a criticism as that Scott had no very uncompromising belief in the Thirty-nine Articles; for that is a weakness which he would share with his critic and with his critic's idol, Goethe. The meaning is partly given by another phrase. "While Shakespeare works from the heart outwards, Scott," says Carlyle, "works

from the skin inwards, never getting near the heart of men." The books are addressed entirely to the everyday mind. They have nothing to do with emotions or principles, beyond those of the ordinary country gentleman; and, we may add, of the country gentleman with his digestion in good order, and his hereditary gout still in the distant future. The more inspiring thoughts, the deeper passions, are seldom roused. If in his width of sympathy, and his vivid perception of character within certain limits, he reminds us of Shakespeare, we can find no analogy in his writings to the passion of *Romeo and Juliet*, or to the intellectual agony of *Hamlet*. The charge is not really that Scott lacks faith, but that he never appeals, one way or the other, to the faculties which make faith a vital necessity to some natures, or lead to a desperate revolt against established faiths in others. If Byron and Scott could have been combined; if the energetic passions of the one could have been joined to the healthy nature and quick sympathies of the other, we might have seen another Shakespeare in the nineteenth century. As it is, both of them are maimed and imperfect on different sides. It is, in fact, remarkable how Scott fails when he attempts a flight into the regions where he is less at home than in his ordinary style. Take, for

instance, a passage from *Rob Roy*, where our dear friend, the Bailie, Nicol Jarvie, is taken prisoner by Rob Roy's amiable wife, and appeals to her feelings of kinship:

"I dinna ken," said the undaunted Bailie, "if the kindred has ever been weel redd out to you yet, cousin—but it's kenned, and can be proved. My mother, Elspeth Macfarlane (otherwise Macgregor), was the wife of my father, Denison Nicol Jarvie (peace be with them baith), and Elspeth was the daughter of Farlane Macfarlane (or Macgregor), at the shielding of Loch Sloy. Now this Farlane Macfarlane (or Macgregor), as his surviving daughter, Maggy Macfarlane, wha married Duncan Macnab of Stuckavrallachan, can testify, stood as near to your gudeman, Robin Macgregor, as in the fourth degree of kindred, fur——"

The virago lopped the genealogical tree by demanding haughtily if a stream of rushing water acknowleged any relation with the portion withdrawn from it for the mean domestic uses of those who dwelt on its banks?

The Bailie is as real a human being as ever lived—as the present Lord Mayor, or Dandie Dinmont, or Sir Walter himself; but Mrs. Macgregor has obviously just stepped off the boards of a minor theatre, devoted to the melodrama. As long as Scott keeps to his strong ground, his figures are as good flesh and blood as ever walked in the Saltmarket of Glasgow; when once he

tries his heroics, he too often manufactures his characters from the materials used by the frequenters of masked balls. Yet there are many such occasions on which his genius does not desert him. Balfour of Burley may rub shoulders against genuine Covenanters and west-country Whigs without betraying his fictitious origin. The Master of Ravenswood attitudinises a little too much with his Spanish cloak and his slouched hat; but we feel really sorry for him when he disappears in the Kelpie's Flow. And when Scott has to do with his own peasants, with the thoroughbred Presbyterian Scotchman, he can bring intense tragic interest from his homely materials. Douce Davie Deans, distracted between his religious principles and his desire of saving his daughter's life, and seeking relief even in the midst of his agonies by that admirable burst of spiritual pride:

> Though I will neither exalt myself nor pull down others, I wish that every man and woman in this land had kept the true testimony and the middle and straight path, as it were on the ridge of a hill, where wind and water steals, avoiding right-hand snare and extremes, and left-hand way-slidings, as well as Johnny Dodds of Farthy's acre and ae man mair that shall be nameless—

Davie is as admirable a figure as ever appeared in

fiction. It is a pity that he was mixed up with the conventional madwoman, Madge Wildfire, and that a story most touching in its native simplicity was twisted and tortured into needless intricacy The religious exaltation of Balfour, or the religious pig-headedness of Davie Deans, are indeed given from the point of view of the kindly humourist rather than of one who can fully sympathise with the sublimity of an intense faith in a homely exterior. And though many good judges hold the *Bride of Lammermoor* to be Scott's best performance, in virtue of the loftier passions which animate the chief actors in the tragedy, we are, after all, called upon to sympathise as much with the gentleman of good family who can't ask his friends to dinner without an unworthy device to hide his poverty, as with the passionate lover whose mistress has her heart broken. In truth, this criticism as to the absence of high passion reminds us again that Scott was a thorough Scotsman, and—for it is necessary, even now, to avoid the queer misconception which confounds together the most distinct races—a thorough Saxon. He belonged, that is, to the race which has in the most eminent degree the typical English qualities. Especially his intellect had a strong substratum of downright dogged common-sense; his religion, one may conjecture, was pretty much

that of all men of sense in his time. It was that of the society which had produced and been influenced by Hume and Adam Smith; which had dropped its old dogmas without becoming openly sceptical, but which emphatically took "common-sense" for the motto of its philosophy. It was equally afraid of bigotry and scepticism and had manufactured a creed out of decent compromises which served well enough for ordinary purposes. Even Hume, a sceptic in theory, was a Tory and a Scottish patriot in politics. Scott, who cared nothing for abstract philosophy, did not bother himself to form any definite system of opinions; he shared Hume's political prejudices without inquiring into his philosophy. He thoroughly detested the dogmatism of the John Knox variety, and considered the Episcopal Church to offer the religion for a gentleman. But his common-sense in such matters was chiefly shown by not asking awkward questions and adopting the creed which was most to his taste without committing himself to any strong persuasion as to abstract truth. He would, on the whole, leave such matters alone, an attitude of mind which was not to Carlyle's taste. In the purely artistic direction, this common-sense is partly responsible for the defect which has been so often noticed in Scott's heroes. Your genuine Scot is indeed as capable of intense

passion as any human being in the world. Burns is proof enough of the fact if any one doubted it. But Scott was a man of more massive and less impulsive character. If he had strong passions, they were ruled by his common-sense; he kept them well in hand, and did not write till the period of youthful effervescence was over. His heroes always seem to be described from the point of view of a man old enough to see the folly of youthful passion or too old fully to sympathise with it. They are chiefly remarkable for a punctilious pride which gives their creator some difficulty in keeping them out of superfluous duels. When they fall in love they always seem to feel themselves as Lovel felt himself in the *Antiquary*, under the eye of Jonathan Oldbuck, who was himself once in love but has come to see that he was a fool for his pains. Certainly, somehow or other, they are apt to be terribly wooden. Cranstoun in the *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, Graeme in the *Lady of the Lake*, or Wilton in *Marmion*, are all unspeakable bores. Waverley himself, and Lovel in the *Antiquary*, and Vanbeest Brown in *Guy Mannering*, and Harry Morton in *Old Mortality*, and, in short, the whole series of Scott's pattern young men, are all chips of the same block. They can all run, and ride, and fight, and make pretty speeches, and express the most becoming

sentiments; but somehow they all partake of one fault, the same which was charged against the otherwise incomparable horse, namely, that they are dead. And we must confess that this is a considerable drawback from Scott's novels. To take the passion out of a novel is something like taking the sunlight out of a landscape; and to condemn all the heroes to be utterly commonplace is to remove the centre of interest in a manner detrimental to the best intents of the story. When Thackeray endeavoured to restore Rebecca to her rightful place in *Ivanhoe*, he was only doing what is more or less desirable in all the series. We long to dismount these insipid creatures from the pride of place, and to supplant them by some of the admirable characters who are doomed to play subsidiary parts. There is, however, another reason for this weakness which seems to be overlooked by many of Scott's critics. We are often referred to Scott as a master of pure and what is called "objective" story-telling. Certainly I don't deny that Scott could be an admirable story-teller: *Ivanhoe* and the *Bride of Lammermoor* would be sufficient to convict me of error if I did. But as mere stories, many of his novels—and moreover his masterpieces—are not only faulty, but distinctly bad. Taking him purely and simply from that point of view, he is

very inferior, for example, to Alexandre Dumas. You cannot follow the thread of most of his narratives with any particular interest in the fate of the chief actors. In the "Introductory Epistle" prefixed to the *Fortunes of Nigel*, Scott himself gives a very interesting account of his method. He has often, he says in answer to an imaginary critic, begun by laying down a plan of his work and tried to construct an ideal story, evolving itself by due degrees and ending by a proper catastrophe. But, a demon seats himself on his pen, and leads it astray. Characters expand; incidents multiply; the story lingers while the materials increase; Bailie Jarvie or Dugald Dalgetty leads him astray, and he goes many a weary mile from the regular road and has to leap hedge and ditch to get back. If he resists the temptation, his imagination flags and he becomes prosy and dull. No one can read his best novels without seeing the truth of this description. *Waverley* made an immense success as a description of new scenes and social conditions: the story of Waverley himself is the least interesting part of the book. Everybody who has read *Guy Mannering* remembers Dandie Dinmont and Meg Merrilies and Pleydell and Dominie Sampson; but how many people could explain the ostensible story—the love affair of Vanbeest Brown and

Julia Mannering? We can see how Scott put the story together. He was pouring out the most vivid and interesting recollections of the borderers whom he knew so well, of the old Scottish gentry and smugglers and peasants, and the old-fashioned lawyers who played high jinks in the wynds of Edinburgh. No more delightful collection of portraits could be brought together. But he had to get a story as a thread. He started with the legend about an astrological prediction told of Dryden and one of his sons, and mixed it up with the Annesley case, where a claimant turned up with more plausibility than the notorious Orton. This introduced of necessity an impossible and conventional bit of lovemaking and a recognition of a long-lost heir. He is full of long-lost heirs. Equally conventional and impossible stories are introduced in the *Antiquary*, the *Heart of Midlothian*, and the *Legend of Montrose* and elsewhere. Nobody cares about them, and the characters which ostensibly play the chief part serve merely to introduce us to the subordinate actors. *Waverley*, for example, gives a description drawn with unsurpassable spirit of the state of the Highland clans in 1745; and poor Waverley's love affair passes altogether out of sight during the greatest and most interesting part of the narrative. When Moore said of the

poems that Scott intended to illustrate all the gentlemen's seats between Edinburgh and London, he was not altogether wide of the mark. The novels are all illustrations—not of "gentlemen's seats" indeed, but of various social states; and it is only by a kind of happy accident when this interest in the surroundings does not put the chief characters out of focus. Nobody has created a greater number of admirable types, but when we run over their names we perceive that in most cases they are the secondary performers who are ousting the nominal heroes and heroines from their places. Dugald Dalgetty, for example, becomes so attractive that he squeezes all the other actors into a mere corner of the canvas. Perhaps nothing more is necessary to explain why Scott failed as a dramatist. With him, Hamlet would have been a mere peg to show us how Rosencrantz and Guildenstern amused themselves at the royal drinking parties.

For this reason, again, Scott bestows an apparently disproportionate amount of imagination upon the mere scene-painting, the external trappings, the clothes, or dwelling-places of his performers. A traveller into a strange country naturally gives us the external peculiarities which strike him. Scott has to tell us what "completed the costume" of his Highland chiefs or

mediæval barons. He took, in short, to that "buff-jerkin" business of which Carlyle speaks so contemptuously, and fairly carried away the hearts of his contemporaries by a lavish display of mediæval upholstery. Lockhart tells us that Scott could not bear the commonplace daubings of walls with uniform coats of white, blue, and grey. All the roofs at Abbotsford

> were, in appearance at least, of carved oak, relieved by coats-of-arms duly blazoned at the intersections of beams, and resting on cornices, to the eye of the same material, but composed of casts in plaster of Paris, after the foliage, the flowers, the grotesque monsters and dwarfs, and sometimes the beautiful heads of nuns and confessors, on which he had doated from infancy among the cloisters of Melrose Abbey.

The plaster looks as well as the carved oak for a time; but the day speedily comes when the sham crumbles into ashes, and Scott's knights and nobles, like his carved cornices, became dust in the next generation. It is hard to say it, and yet we fear it must be admitted, that many of those historical novels, which once charmed all men, and for which we have still a lingering affection, are rapidly converting themselves into mere débris of plaster of Paris. Sir F. Palgrave says somewhere that "historical novels are mortal enemies to history," and we are often tempted

to add that they are mortal enemies to fiction. There may be an exception or two, but as a rule the task is simply impracticable. The novelist is bound to come so near to the facts that we feel the unreality of his portraits. Either the novel becomes pure cram, a dictionary of antiquities dissolved in a thin solution of romance, or, which is generally more refreshing, it takes leave of accuracy altogether and simply takes the plot and the costume from history, but allows us to feel that genuine moderns are masquerading in the dress of a bygone century. Even in the last case, it generally results in a kind of dance in fetters and a comparative breakdown under self-imposed obligations. *Ivanhoe* and *Kenilworth* and *Quentin Durward*, and the rest are of course audacious anachronisms for the genuine historian. Scott was imposed upon by his own fancy. He was probably not aware that his Balfour of Burley was real flesh and blood, because painted from real people round him, while his Claverhouse is made chiefly of plumes and jackboots. Scott is chiefly responsible for the odd perversion of facts, which reached its height, as Macaulay remarks, in the marvellous performance of our venerated ruler, George IV. That monarch, he observes, "thought that he could not give a more striking proof of his

respect for the usages which had prevailed in Scotland before the Union than by disguising himself in what, before the Union, was considered by nine Scotchmen out of ten as the dress of a thief." The passage recalls the too familiar anecdote about Scott and the wine-glass consecrated by the sacred lips of his king. At one of the portrait exhibitions in South Kensington was hung up a representation of George IV., with the body of a stalwart Highlander in full costume, some seven or eight feet high; the face formed from the red puffy cheeks developed by innumerable bottles of port and burgundy at Carlton House; and the whole surmounted by a bonnet with waving plumes. Scott was chiefly responsible for disguising that elderly London debauchee in the costume of a wild Gaelic cattle-stealer, and was apparently insensible of the gross absurdity. We are told that an air of burlesque was thrown over the proceedings at Holyrood by the apparition of a true London alderman in the same costume as his master. An alderman who could burlesque such a monarch must indeed have been a credit to his turtle-soup. Let us pass by with a brief lamentation that so great and good a man laid himself open to Carlyle's charge of sham worship. We have lost our love of buff jerkins and other scraps from mediæval museums, and Scott is

suffering from having preferred working in stucco to carving in marble. We are perhaps inclined to saddle Scott unconsciously with the sins of a later generation. Borrow, in his delightful *Lavengro*, meets a kind of Jesuit in disguise in that sequestered dell where he beats "the Blazing Tinman." The Jesuit, if I remember rightly, confides to him that Scott was a tool of that diabolical conspiracy which has infected our old English Protestantism with the poison of modern Popery. And, though the evil may be traced further back, and was due to more general causes than the influence of any one writer, Scott was clearly responsible in his degree for certain recent phenomena. The buff jerkin became the lineal ancestor of various copes, stoles, and chasubles which stink in the nostrils of honest Dissenters. Our modern revivalists profess to despise the flimsiness of the first attempts in this direction. They laugh at the carpenter's Gothic of Abbotsford or Strawberry Hill, and do not ask themselves how their own more elaborate blundering will look in the eyes of a future generation. What will our posterity think of our masquerading in old clothes? Will they want a new Cromwell to sweep away nineteenth-century shams, as his ancestors smashed mediæval ruins, or will they, as we may rather hope, be content to let our

pretentious rubbish find its natural road to ruin? One thing is pretty certain, and in its way comforting; that, however far the rage for revivalism may be pushed, nobody will ever want to revive the nineteenth century. But for Scott, in spite of his complicity in this wearisome process, there is something still to be said. *Ivanhoe* cannot be given up. The vivacity of the description—the delight with which Scott throws himself into the pursuit of his knicknacks and antiquarian rubbish, has something contagious about it. *Ivanhoe*, let it be granted, is no longer a work for men, but it still is, or still ought to be, delightful reading for boys. The ordinary boy, indeed, when he reads anything, seems to choose descriptions of the cricket-matches and boat-races in which his soul most delights. But there must still be some unsophisticated youths who can relish *Robinson Crusoe* and the *Arabian Nights* and other favourites of our own childhood, and such at least should pore over the "Gentle and free passage of arms at Ashby," admire those incredible feats with the long-bow which would have enabled Robin Hood to meet successfully a modern volunteer armed with the Martini-Henry, and follow the terrific head-breaking of Front de Bœuf, Bois-Guilbert, the holy clerk of Copmanshurst, and the *Noir Fainéant*, even to the time when, for no

particular reason beyond the exigencies of the story, the Templar suddenly falls from his horse, and is discovered, to our no small surprise, to be "unscathed by the lance of the enemy," and to have died a victim to the violence of his own contending passions. If *Ivanhoe* has been exploded by Professor Freeman, it did good work in its day. If it were possible for a critic to weigh the merits of a great man in a balance, and to decide precisely how far his excellences exceed his defects, we should have to set off Scott's real services to the spread of a genuine historical spirit against the encouragement which he afforded to its bastard counterfeit. To enable us rightly to appreciate our forefathers, to recognise that they were living men, and to feel our close connection with them, is to put a vivid imagination to one of its worthiest uses. It was perhaps inevitable that we should learn to appreciate our ancestors by paying them the doubtful compliment of external mimicry; and that only by slow degrees, and at the price of much humiliating experience, should we learn the simple lesson that a childish adult has not the grace of childhood. Even in his errors, however, Scott had the merit of unconsciousness, which is fast disappearing from our more elaborate affectations; and, therefore, though we regret, we are not irritated by his

weakness and deficiency in true insight. He really enjoys his playthings too naïvely for the pleasure not to be a little contagious, when we can descend from our critical dignity. In his later work, indeed, the effort becomes truly painful, tending more to the provocation of sadness than of anger. But that work is best forgotten except as an occasional warning.

Scott, however, understood, and nobody has better illustrated by example, the true mode of connecting past and present. Mr. Palgrave, whose recognition of the charm of Scott's lyrics merits our gratitude, observes in the notes to the *Golden Treasury* that the songs about Brignall banks and Rosabelle exemplify "the peculiar skill with which Scott employs proper names;" nor, he adds, "is there a surer sign of high poetical genius." The last remark might possibly be disputed; if Milton possessed the same talent, so did Lord Macaulay, whose ballads, admirable as they are, are not first-rate poetry; but the conclusion to which the remark points is one which is illustrated by each of these cases. The secret of the power is simply this, that a man whose mind is full of historical associations somehow communicates to us something of the sentiment which they awake in himself. Scott, as all who saw him tell us, could never see an old tower, or a bank, or a

rush of a stream without instantly recalling a boundless collection of appropriate anecdotes. He might be quoted as a case in point by those who would explain all poetical imagination by the power of associating ideas. He is the poet of association. A proper name acts upon him like a charm. It calls up the past days, the heroes of the '41, or the skirmish of Drumclog, or the old Covenanting times, by a spontaneous and inexplicable magic. When the barest natural object is taken into his imagination, all manner of past fancies and legends crystallise around it at once.

Though it is more difficult to explain how the same glow which ennobled them to him is conveyed to his readers, the process somehow takes place. We catch the enthusiasm. A word, which strikes us as a bare abstraction in the report of the Censor General, say, or in a collection of poor law returns, gains an entirely new significance when he touches it in the most casual manner. A kind of mellowing atmosphere surrounds all objects in his pages, and tinges them with poetical hues. Even the Scottish dialect, repulsive to some ignorant Southrons, becomes musical to his true admirers. In this power lies one secret of Scott's most successful writing. Thus, for example, I often fancy that the second title of *Waverley* — *'T is Sixty Years Since* — indicates

precisely the distance of time at which a romantic novelist should place himself from his creations. They are just far enough from us to have acquired a certain picturesque colouring, which conceals the vulgarity, and yet leaves them living and intelligible beings. His best stories might be all described as *Tales of a Grandfather*. They have the charm of anecdotes told to the narrator by some old man who had himself been part of what he describes. Scott's best novels depend, for their deep interest, upon the scenery and society with which he had been familiar in his early days, more or less harmonised by removal to what we may call, in a different sense from the common one, the twilight of history; that period, namely, from which the broad glare of the present has departed, and which we can yet dimly observe without making use of the dark lantern of ancient historians, and accepting the guidance of Dryasdust. Dandie Dinmont, though a contemporary of Scott's youth, represented a fast perishing phase of society; and Balfour of Burley, though his day was past, had yet left his mantle with many spiritual descendants who were scarcely less familiar. Between the times so fixed Scott seems to exhibit his genuine power; and within these limits we should find it hard to name any second, or indeed any third.

Indeed, when we have gone as far as we please in denouncing shams, ridiculing men in buff jerkins, and the whole Wardour Street business of gimcrack and Brummagem antiquities, it still remains true that Scott's great service was what we may call the vivification of history. He made us feel, it is generally said, as no one had ever made us feel before, that the men of the past were once real human beings; and I can agree if I am permitted to make a certain distinction. His best service, I should say, was not so much in showing us the past as it was when it was present; but in showing us the past as it is really still present. His knights and crusaders and feudal nobles are after all unreal, and the best critics felt even in his own day that his greatest triumphs were in describing the Scottish peasantry of his time. Dandie Dinmont and Jeanie Deans and their like are better than many Front de Bœufs and Robin Hoods. It is in dealing with his own contemporaries that he really shows the imaginative insight which entitles him to be called a great creator as well as an amusing story-teller. But this, rightly stated, is not inconsistent with the previous statement. For the special characteristic of Scott as distinguished from his predecessors is precisely his clear perception that the characters whom he loved so well and

described so vividly were the products of a long historical evolution. His patriotism was the love of a country in which everything had obvious roots in its previous history. The stout farmer Dinmont was the descendant of the old borderers; the Deanses were survivals from the days of the Covenanters or of John Knox; every peculiarity upon which he delighted to dwell was invested with all the charm of descent from a long and picturesque history. When Fielding describes the squires or lawyers of the eighteenth century, he says nothing to show that he was even aware of the existence of a seventeenth, or still less of a sixteenth century. Scott can describe no character without assigning to it its place in the social organism which has been growing up since the earliest dawn of history. This was, of course, no accident. He came at the time when the little provincial centres were just feeling the first invasion of the great movements from without. Edinburgh, whether quite comparable to Athens or not, had been for two or three generations a remarkable centre of intellectual cultivation. Hume and Adam Smith were only the most conspicuous members of a society which monopolised pretty well all the philosophy which existed in the island and a great deal of the history and criticism. In Scott's time the patriotic feeling

which had been a blind instinct was becoming more or less self-conscious. The literary society in which Scott was leader of the Tories, and Jeffrey of the Whigs, included a large proportion of the best intellect of the time and was sufficiently in contact with the outside world to be conscious of its own characteristics. When the crash of the French Revolution came in Scott's youth, Burke denounced its *à priori* abstract reasonings in the name of prescription. A traditional order and belief were essential, as he urged, to the well-being of every human society. What Scott did afterwards was precisely to show by concrete instances, most vividly depicted, the value and interest of a natural body of traditions. Like many other of his ablest contemporaries, he saw with alarm the great movement, of which the French Revolution was the obvious embodiment, sweeping away all manner of local traditions and threatening to engulf the little society which still retained its specific character in Scotland. He was stirred, too, in his whole nature when any sacrilegious reformer threatened to sweep away any part of the true old Scottish system. And this is, in fact, the moral implicitly involved in Scott's best work. Take the beggar, for example, Edie Ochiltree, the old "bluegown." Beggars, you say, are a nuisance and would be

sentenced to starvation by Mr. Malthus in the name of an abstract principle of population. But look, says Scott, at the old-fashioned beggar as he really was. He had his place in society; he was the depository of the legends of the whole country-side: chatting with the lairds, the confidential friend of fishermen, peasants, and farmers; the oracle in all sports and ruler of village feasts; repaying in friendly offices far more than the value of the alms which he took as a right; a respecter of old privileges, because he had privileges himself; and ready when the French came to take his part in fighting for the old country. There can be no fear for a country, says Scott, where even the beggar is as ready to take up arms as the noble. The bluegown, in short, is no waif and stray, no product of social corruption, or mere obnoxious parasite, but a genuine member of the fabric, who could respect himself and scorn servility as much as the highest members of the social hierarchy. Scott, as Lockhart tells us, was most grievously wounded by the insults of the Radical mob in Selkirk, who cried "Burke Sir Walter!" in the place where all men had loved and honoured him. It was the meeting of the old and new, and the revelation to Scott in brutal terms of the new spirit which was destroying all the old social ties. Scott and

Wordsworth and Coleridge and Southey and their like saw in fact the approach of that industrial revolution, as we call it now, which for good or evil has been ever since developing. The Radicals denounced them as mere sentimentalists; the solid Whigs, who fancied that the revolution was never to get beyond the Reform Bill of 1832, laughed at them as mere obstructives; by us, who, whatever our opinions, speak with the advantage of later experience, it must be admitted that such Conservatism had its justification, and that good and far-seeing men might well look with alarm at changes whose far-reaching consequences cannot yet be estimated. Scott, meanwhile, is the incomparable painter of the sturdy race which he loved so well—a race high-spirited, loyal to its principles, surpassingly energetic, full of strong affections and manly spirits, if crabbed, bigoted, and capable of queer perversity and narrow self-conceit. Nor, if we differ from his opinions, can any one who desires to take a reasonable view of history doubt the interest and value of the conceptions involved. Scott was really the first imaginative observer who saw distinctly how the national type of character is the product of past history, and embodies all the great social forces by which it has slowly shaped itself. That is the new element in his portraiture of human life; and

we may pardon him if he set rather too high a value upon the picturesque elements which he had been the first to recognise. One of the acutest of recent writers upon politics, the late Mr. Bagehot, has insisted upon the immense value of what he called a "solid cake of customs," and the thought is more or less familiar to every writer of the evolutionist way of thinking. Scott, without any philosophy to speak of, political or otherwise, saw and recognised intuitively a typical instance. He saw how much the social fabric had been woven out of ancient tradition; and he made others see it more clearly than could be done by any abstract reasoner.

When naturalists wish to preserve a skeleton, they bury an animal in an ant-hill and dig him up after many days with all the perishable matter fairly eaten away. That is the process which great men have to undergo. A vast multitude of insignificant, unknown, and unconscious critics destroy what has no genuine power of resistance, and leave the remainder for posterity. Much disappears in every case, and it is a question, perhaps, whether the firmer parts of Scott's reputation will be sufficiently coherent to resist after the removal of the rubbish. We must admit that even his best work is of more or less mixed value, and that the test will be a severe one. Yet we

hope, not only for reasons already suggested, but for one which remains to be expressed. The ultimate source of pleasure derivable from all art is that it brings you into communication with the artist. What you really love in the picture or the poem is the painter or the poet whom it brings into sympathy with you across the gulf of time. He tells you what are the thoughts which some fragment of natural scenery, or some incident of human life, excited in a mind greatly wiser and more perceptive than your own. A dramatist or a novelist professes to describe different actors on his little scene, but he is really setting forth the varying phases of his own mind. And so Dandie Dinmont, or the Antiquary, or Balfour of Burley, is merely the conductor through which Scott's personal magnetism affects our own natures. And certainly, whatever faults a critic may discover in the work, it may be said that no work in our literature places us in communication with a manlier or more lovable nature. Scott, indeed, setting up as the landed proprietor at Abbotsford, and solacing himself with painted plaster of Paris instead of carved oak, does not strike us, any more than he does Carlyle, as a very noble phenomenon. But luckily for us, we have also the Scott who must have been the most charming of all conceivable companions; the Scott who was

idolised even by a judicious pig; the Scott, who, unlike the irritable race of literary magnates in general, never lost a friend, and whose presence diffused an equable glow of kindly feeling to the farthest limits of the social system which gravitated round him. He was not precisely brilliant; nobody, so far as we know, who wrote so many sentences has left so few that have fixed themselves upon us as established commonplaces; beyond that unlucky phrase about "my name being MacGregor and my foot being on my native heath"—which is not a very admirable sentiment—I do not at present remember a single gem of this kind. Landor, I think, said that in the whole of Scott's poetry there was only one good line, that, namely, in the poem about Helvellyn referring to the dog of the lost man—

> When the wind waved his garments, how oft didst thou start!

Scott is not one of the coruscating geniuses, throwing out epigrams at every turn, and sparkling with good things. But the poetry, which was first admired to excess and then rejected with undue contempt, is now beginning to find its due level. It is not poetry of the first order. It is not the poetry of deep meditation or of rapt enthusiasm. Much that was once admired has now

become rather offensive than otherwise. And yet it has a charm, which becomes more sensible the more familiar we grow with it, the charm of unaffected and spontaneous love of nature; and not only is it perfectly in harmony with the nature which Scott loved so well, but it is still the best interpreter of the sound healthy love of wild scenery. Wordsworth, no doubt, goes deeper; and Byron is more vigorous; and Shelley more ethereal. But it is, and will remain, a good thing to have a breath from the Cheviots brought straight into London streets, as Scott alone can do it. When Washington Irving visited Scott, they had an amicable dispute as to the scenery: Irving, as became an American, complaining of the absence of forests; Scott declaring his love for "his honest grey hills," and saying that if he did not see the heather once a year he thought he should die. Everybody who has refreshed himself with mountain and moor this summer should feel how much we owe, and how much more we are likely to owe in future, to the man who first inoculated us with his own enthusiasm, and who is still the best interpreter of the "honest grey hills." Scott's poetical faculty may, perhaps, be more felt in his prose than his verse. The fact need not be decided; but as we read the best of his novels we feel ourselves transported to the

"distant Cheviot's blue;" mixing with the sturdy dalesmen, and the tough indomitable Puritans of his native land; for their sakes we can forgive the exploded feudalism and the faded romance which he attempted with less success to galvanise into life. The pleasure of that healthy open-air life, with that manly companion, is not likely to diminish; and Scott as its exponent may still retain a hold upon our affections which would have been long ago forfeited if he had depended entirely on his romantic nonsense. We are rather in the habit of talking about a healthy animalism, and try most elaborately to be simple and manly. When we turn from our modern professors in that line, who affect a total absence of affectation, to Scott's Dandie Dinmonts and Edie Ochiltrees, we see the difference between the sham and the reality, and fancy that Scott may still have a lesson or two to preach to this generation. Those to come must take care of themselves.

# Nathaniel Hawthorne

The most obvious fact about Hawthorne is that he gave one solution of the problem, what elements of romance are discoverable amongst the harsh prose of this prosaic age. How is the novelist who, by the inevitable conditions of his style, is bound to come into the closest possible contact with facts, who has to give us the details of his hero's clothes, to tell us what he had for breakfast, and what is the state of the balance at his banker's—how is he to introduce the ideal element which must, in some degree, be present in all genuine art? What precisely is meant by "ideal" is a question which for the moment I pretermit. Anyhow a mere photographic reproduction of this muddy, money-making, bread-and-butter-eating world would be intolerable. At the very lowest, some effort must be made at least to select the most promising materials, and to strain out the coarse or the simply prosaic ingredients. Various attempts have been made to solve the problem since De Foe founded the

modern school of English novelists, by giving us what is in one sense a servile imitation of genuine narrative, but which is redeemed from prose by the unique force of the situation. De Foe painting mere everyday pots and pans is as dull as a modern blue-book; but when his pots and pans are the resource by which a human being struggles out of the most appalling conceivable "slough of despond," they become more poetical than the vessels from which the gods drink nectar in epic poems. Since he wrote, novelists have made many voyages of discovery, with varying success, though they have seldom had the fortune to touch upon so marvellous an island as that still sacred to the immortal Crusoe. They have ventured far into cloudland, and, returning to *terra firma*, they have plunged into the trackless and savage-haunted regions which are girdled by the Metropolitan Railway. They have watched the magic coruscations of some strange "Aurora Borealis" of dim romance, or been content with the domestic gaslight of London streets. Amongst the most celebrated of all such adventurers were the band which obeyed the impulse of Sir Walter Scott. For a time it seemed that we had reached a genuine Eldorado of novelists, where solid gold was to be had for the asking, and visions of more than earthly beauty rewarded the labours of the

explorer. Now, alas! our opinion is a good deal changed; the fairy treasures which Scott brought back from his voyages have turned into dead leaves according to custom; and the curiosities, upon which he set so extravagant a price, savour more of Wardour Street than of the genuine mediæval artists. Nay, there are scoffers, though I am not of them, who think that the tittle-tattle which Miss Austen gathered at the country-houses of our grandfathers is worth more than the showy but rather flimsy eloquence of the "Ariosto of the North." Scott endeavoured at least, if with indifferent success, to invest his scenes with something of

> The light that never was on sea or land,
> The consecration and the poet's dream.

If he too often indulged in mere theatrical devices, and mistook the glare of the footlights for the sacred glow of the imagination, he professed, at least, to introduce us to an ideal world. Later novelists have generally abandoned the attempt, and are content to reflect our work-a-day life with almost servile fidelity. They are not to be blamed; and doubtless the very greatest writers are those who can bring their ideal world into the closest possible contact with our sympathies, and show us heroic figures in modern frock-coats and

Parisian fashions. The art of story-telling is manifold, and its charm depends greatly upon the infinite variety of its applications. And yet, for that very reason, there are moods in which one wishes that the modern story-teller would more frequently lead us away from the commonplace region of newspapers and railways to regions where the imagination can have fair play. Hawthorne is one of the few eminent writers to whose guidance we may in such moods most safely entrust ourselves; and it is tempting to ask, what was the secret of his success? The effort, indeed, to investigate the materials from which some rare literary flavour is extracted is seldom satisfactory. We are reminded of the automaton chess-player who excited the wonder of the last generation. The showman, like the critic, laid bare his inside, and displayed all the cunning wheels and cogs and cranks by which his motions were supposed to be regulated. Yet, after all, the true secret was that there was a man inside the machine. Some such impression is often made by the most elaborate demonstrations of literary anatomists. We have been mystified, not really entrusted with any revelation. And yet, with this warning as to the probable success of our examination, let us try to determine some of the peculiarities to which Hawthorne owes this strange power of

bringing poetry out of the most unpromising materials.

In the first place, then, he had the good fortune to be born in the most prosaic of all countries—the most prosaic, that is, in external appearance, and even in the superficial character of its inhabitants. Hawthorne himself reckoned this as an advantage, though in a very different sense from that in which we are speaking. It was as a patriot, and not as an artist, that he congratulated himself on his American origin. There is a humorous struggle between his sense of the rawness and ugliness of his native land and the dogged patriotism befitting a descendant of the genuine New England Puritans. Hawthorne the novelist writhes at the discords which torture his delicate sensibilities at every step; but instantly Hawthorne the Yankee protests that the very faults are symptomatic of excellence. He is like a sensitive mother, unable to deny that her awkward hobbledehoy of a son offends against the proprieties, but tacitly resolved to see proofs of virtues present or to come even in his clumsiest tricks. He forces his apologies to sound like boasting.

> No author [he says] can conceive of the difficulty of writing a romance about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque

and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a commonplace prosperity, as is happily [it must and shall be happily!] the case with my dear native land. It will be very long, I trust, before romance-writers may find congenial and easily-handled themes either in the annals of our stalwart republic, or in any characteristic and probable events of our individual lives. Romance and poetry, ivy, lichens, and wallflowers need ruins to make them grow.

If, that is, I am forced to confess that poetry and romance are absent, I will resolutely stick to it that poetry and romance are bad things, even though the love of them is the strongest propensity of my nature. To my thinking, there is something almost pathetic in this loyal self-deception; and therefore I have never been offended by certain passages in *Our Old Home* which appear to have caused some irritation in touchy Englishmen. There is something, he says by way of apology, which causes an American in England to take up an attitude of antagonism. "These people think so loftily of themselves, and so contemptuously of everybody else, that it requires more generosity than I possess to keep always in perfectly good humour with them." That may be true; for, indeed, I believe that all Englishmen, whether ostentatiously cosmopolitan or ostentatiously patriotic, have a peculiar type of national pride at least as offensive as that of

Frenchmen, Germans, or Americans; and, to a man of Hawthorne's delicate perceptions, the presence of that sentiment would reveal itself through the most careful disguises. But that which really caused him to cherish his antagonism was, I suspect, something else: he was afraid of loving us too well; he feared to be tempted into a denial of some point of his patriotic creed; he is always clasping it, as it were, to his bosom, and vowing and protesting that he does not surrender a single jot or tittle of it. Hawthorne in England was like a plant suddenly removed to a rich soil from a dry and thirsty land. He drinks in at every pore the delightful influences of which he has had so scanty a supply. An old cottage, an ivy-grown wall, a country churchyard with its quaint epitaphs, things that are commonplace to most Englishmen and which are hateful to the sanitary inspector, are refreshing to every fibre of his soul. He tries in vain to take the sanitary inspector's view. In spite of himself he is always falling into the romantic tone, though a sense that he ought to be sternly philosophical just gives a humorous tinge to his enthusiasm. Charles Lamb could not have improved his description of the old hospital at Leicester, where the twelve brethren still wear the badge of the Bear and Ragged Staff. He lingers round it, and gossips with the

brethren, and peeps into the garden, and sits by the cavernous archway of the kitchen fireplace, where the very atmosphere seems to be redolent with aphorisms first uttered by ancient monks, and jokes derived from Master Slender's note-book, and gossip about the wrecks of the Spanish Armada. No connoisseur could pore more lovingly over an ancient black-letter volume, or the mellow hues of some old painter's masterpiece. He feels the charm of our historical continuity, where the immemorial past blends indistinguishably with the present, to the remotest recesses of his imagination. But then the Yankee nature within him must put in a sharp word or two; he has to jerk the bridle for fear that his enthusiasm should fairly run away with him. "The trees and other objects of an English landscape," he remarks, or, perhaps we should say, he complains, "take hold of one by numberless minute tendrils as it were, which, look as closely as we choose, we never find in an American scene;" but he inserts a qualifying clause, just by way of protest, that an American tree would be more picturesque if it had an equal chance; and the native oak of which we are so proud is summarily condemned for "John Bullism"—a mysterious offence common to many things in England. Charlecote Hall, he presently admits, "is a most

delightful place." Even an American is tempted to believe that real homes can only be produced by "the slow ingenuity and labour of many successive generations," when he sees the elaborate beauty and perfection of a well-ordered English abode. And yet he persuades himself that even here he is the victim of some delusion. The impression is due to the old man which still lurks even in the polished American, and forces him to look through his ancestor's spectacles. The true theory, it appears, is that which Holgrave expresses for him in the *Seven Gables*, namely, that we should free ourselves of the material slavery imposed upon us by the brick-and-mortar of past generations, and learn to change our houses as easily as our coats. We ought to feel—only we unfortunately can't feel—that a tent or a wigwam is as good as a house. The mode in which Hawthorne regards the Englishman himself is a quaint illustration of the same theory. An Englishwoman, he admits reluctantly and after many protestations, has some few beauties not possessed by her American sisters. A maiden in her teens has "a certain charm of half-blossom and delicately folded leaves, and tender womanhood shielded by maidenly reserves, with which, somehow or other, our American girls often fail to adorn themselves during an appreciable moment."

But he revenges himself for this concession by an almost savage onslaught upon the full-blown British matron with her "awful ponderosity of frame . . . massive with solid beef and streaky tallow," and apparently composed "of steaks and sirloins." He laments that the English violet should develop into such an over-blown peony, and speculates upon the whimsical problem, whether a middle-aged husband should be considered as legally married to all the accretions which have overgrown the slenderness of his bride. Should not the matrimonial bond be held to exclude the three fourths of the wife that had no existence when the ceremony was performed? A question not to be put without a shudder. The fact is, that Hawthorne had succeeded only too well in misleading himself by a common fallacy. That pestilent personage, John Bull, has assumed so concrete a form in our imaginations, with his top-boots and his broad shoulders and vast circumference, and the emblematic bulldog at his heels, that for most observers he completely hides the Englishman of real life. Hawthorne had decided that an Englishman must and should be a mere mass of transformed beef and beer. No observation could shake his preconceived impression. At Greenwich Hospital he encountered the mighty shade of the concentrated essence of our

strongest national qualities; no truer Englishman ever lived than Nelson. But Nelson was certainly not the conventional John Bull, and, therefore, Hawthorne roundly asserts that he was not an Englishman. "More than any other Englishman he won the love and admiration of his country, but won them through the efficacy of qualities that are not English." Nelson was of the same breed as Cromwell, though his shoulders were not so broad; but Hawthorne insists that the broad shoulders, and not the fiery soul, are the essence of John Bull. He proceeds with amusing unconsciousness to generalise this ingenious theory, and declares that all extraordinary Englishmen are sick men, and therefore deviations from the type. When he meets another remarkable Englishman in the flesh, he applies the same method. Of Leigh Hunt, whom he describes with warm enthusiasm, he dogmatically declares, "there was not an English trait in him from head to foot, morally, intellectually, or physically." And the reason is admirable. "Beef, ale, or stout, brandy or port-wine, entered not at all into his constitution." All Englishmen are made of those ingredients, and if not, why, then, they are not Englishmen. By the same method it is easy to show that all Englishmen are drunkards, or that they are all teetotalers; you have only to exclude

as irrelevant every case that contradicts your theory. Hawthorne, unluckily, is by no means solitary in his mode of reasoning. The ideal John Bull has hidden us from ourselves as well as from our neighbours, and the race which is distinguished above all others for the magnificent wealth of its imaginative literature is daily told—and, what is more, tells itself—that it is a mere lump of prosaic flesh and blood, with scarcely soul enough to keep it from stagnation. If we were sensible we should burn that ridiculous caricature of ourselves along with Guy Fawkes; but meanwhile we can hardly complain if foreigners are deceived by our own misrepresentations.

Against Hawthorne, as I have said, I feel no grudge, though a certain regret that his sympathy with that deep vein of poetical imagination which underlies all our "steaks and sirloins" should have been intercepted by this detestable lay-figure. The poetical humourist must be allowed a certain license in dealing with facts; and poor Hawthorne, in the uncongenial atmosphere of the Liverpool Custom-house, had doubtless much to suffer from a thick-skinned generation. His characteristic shyness made it a hard task for him to penetrate through our outer rind—which, to say the truth, is often elephantine enough—to the central core of heat; and we must not complain

if he was too apt to deny the existence of what to him was unattainable. But the problem recurs —for everybody likes to ask utterly unanswerable questions—whether Hawthorne would not have developed into a still greater artist if he had been more richly supplied with the diet so dear to his inmost soul? Was it not a thing to weep over, that a man so keenly alive to every picturesque influence, so anxious to invest his work with the enchanted haze of romantic association, should be confined till middle age amongst the bleak granite rocks and the half-baked civilisation of New England? "Among ourselves," he laments, "there is no fairy land for the romancer." What if he had been brought up in the native home of the fairies—if there had been thrown open to him the gates through which Shakespeare and Spenser caught their visions of ideal beauty? Might we not have had an appendix to the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and might not a modern *Faerie Queen* have brightened the prosaic wilderness of this nineteenth century? The question, as I have said, is rigidly unanswerable. We have not yet learnt how to breed poets, though we have made some progress in regard to pigs. Nobody can tell, and perhaps, therefore, it is as well that nobody should guess, what would have been the effect of transplanting Shakespeare to modern

Stratford, or of exiling him to the United States. And yet—for it is impossible to resist entirely the pleasure of fruitless speculation—we may guess that there are some reasons why there should be a risk in transplanting so delicate a growth as the genius of Hawthorne. There are more ways, so wise men tell us, of killing a cat than choking it with cream; but it is a very good way. Over-feeding produces atrophy of some of the vital functions in higher animals than cats, and the imagination may be enfeebled rather than strengthened by an over-supply of materials. Hawthorne, if his life had passed where the plough may turn up an antiquity in every furrow, and the whole face of the country is enamelled with ancient culture, might have wrought more gorgeous hues into his tissues, but he might have succumbed to the temptation of producing mere upholstery. The fairy land for which he longed is full of dangerous enchantments, and there are many who have lost in it the vigour which comes from breathing the keen air of every-day life. From that risk Hawthorne was effectually preserved in his New England home. Having to abandon the poetry which is manufactured out of mere external circumstances, he was forced to draw it from deeper sources. With easier means at hand of enriching his pages, he might

have left the mine unworked. It is often good for us to have to make bricks without straw. Hawthorne, who was conscious of the extreme difficulty of the problem, and but partially conscious of the success of his solution of it, naturally complained of the severe discipline to which he owed his strength. We who enjoy the results may feel how much he owed to the very sternness of his education and the niggard hand with which his imaginative sustenance was dealt out to him. The observation may sound paradoxical at the first moment, and yet it is supported by analogy. Are not the best cooks produced just where the raw material is the worst, and precisely because it is there worst? Now, cookery is the art by which man is most easily distinguished from beasts, and it requires little ingenuity to transfer its lessons to literature. At the same time it may be admitted that some closer inquiry is necessary in order to make the hypothesis probable, and I will endeavour from this point of view to examine some of Hawthorne's exquisite workmanship.

The story which perhaps generally passes for his masterpiece is *Transformation*, for most readers assume that a writer's longest book must necessarily be his best. In the present case, I think that this method, which has its conven-

iences, has not led to a perfectly just conclusion. In *Transformation*, Hawthorne has for once the advantage of placing his characters in a land where "a sort of poetic or fairy precinct," as he calls it, is naturally provided for them. The very stones of the streets are full of romance, and he cannot mention a name that has not a musical ring. Hawthorne, moreover, shows his usual tact in confining his aims to the possible. He does not attempt to paint Italian life and manners; his actors belong by birth, or by a kind of naturalisation, to the colony of the American artists in Rome; and he therefore does not labour under the difficulty of being in imperfect sympathy with his creatures. Rome is a mere background, and surely a most felicitous background, to the little group of persons who are effectually detached from all such vulgarising associations with the mechanism of daily life in less poetical countries. The centre of the group, too, who embodies one of Hawthorne's most delicate fancies, could have breathed no atmosphere less richly perfumed with old romance. In New York he would certainly have been in danger of a Barnum's museum, beside Washington's nurse and the woolly horse. It is a triumph of art that a being whose nature trembles on the very verge of the grotesque should walk through Hawthorne's

pages with such undeviating grace. In the Roman dreamland he is in little danger of such prying curiosity, though even there he can only be kept out of harm's way by the admirable skill of his creator. Perhaps it may be thought by some severe critics that, with all his merits, Donatello stands on the very outside verge of the province permitted to the romancer. But without cavilling at what is indisputably charming, and without dwelling upon certain defects of construction which slightly mar the general beauty of the story, it has another weakness which it is impossible quite to overlook. Hawthorne himself remarks that he was surprised, in re-writing his story, to see the extent to which he had introduced descriptions of various Italian objects. "Yet these things," he adds, "fill the mind everywhere in Italy, and especially in Rome, and cannot be kept from flowing out upon the page when one writes freely and with self-enjoyment." The associations which they called up in England were so pleasant that he could not find it in his heart to cancel. Doubtless that is the precise truth, and yet it is equally true that they are artistically out of place. There are passages which recall the guide-book. To take one instance—and, certainly, it is about the worst—the whole party is going to the Coliseum, where a

very striking scene takes place. On the way they pass a baker's shop.

> "The baker is drawing his loaves out of the oven," remarked Kenyon. "Do you smell how sour they are? I should fancy that Minerva (in revenge for the desecration of her temples) had slyly poured vinegar into the batch, if I did not know that the modern Romans prefer their bread in the acetous fermentation."

The instance is trivial, but it is characteristic. Hawthorne had doubtless remarked the smell of the sour bread, and to him it called up a vivid recollection of some stroll in Rome; for, of all our senses, the smell is notoriously the most powerful in awakening associations. But then what do we who read him care about the Roman taste for bread "in acetous fermentation"? When the high-spirited girl is on the way to meet her tormenter, and to receive the provocation which leads to his murder, why should we be worried by a gratuitous remark about Roman baking? It somehow jars upon our taste, and we are certain that, in describing a New England village, Hawthorne would never have admitted a touch which has no conceivable bearing upon the situation. There is almost a superabundance of minute local colour in his American Romances, as, for example, in the *House of the Seven Gables;* but

still, every touch, however minute, is steeped in the sentiment and contributes to the general effect. In Rome the smell of a loaf is sacred to his imagination, and intrudes itself upon its own merits, and, so far as we can discover, without reference to the central purpose. If a baker's shop impresses him unduly because it is Roman, the influence of ancient ruins and glorious works of art is of course still more distracting. The mysterious Donatello, and the strange psychological problem which he is destined to illustrate, are put aside for an interval, whilst we are called upon to listen to descriptions and meditations, always graceful, and often of great beauty in themselves, but yet, in a strict sense, irrelevant. Hawthorne's want of familiarity with the scenery is of course responsible for part of this failing. Had he been a native Roman, he would not have been so preoccupied with the wonders of Rome. But it seems that for a romance bearing upon a spiritual problem, the scenery, however tempting, is not really so serviceable as the less prepossessing surroundings of America. The objects have too great an intrinsic interest. A counter-attraction distorts the symmetry of the system. In the shadow of the Coliseum and St. Peter's you cannot pay much attention to the troubles of a young lady whose existence is painfully ephemeral.

Those mighty objects will not be relegated to the background, and condescend to act as mere scenery. They are, in fact, too romantic for a romance. The fountain of Trevi, with all its allegorical marbles, may be a very picturesque object to describe, but for Hawthorne's purposes it is really not equal to the town-pump at Salem; and Hilda's poetical tower, with the perpetual light before the Virgin's image, and the doves floating up to her from the street, and the column of Antoninus looking at her from the heart of the city, somehow appeals less to our sympathies than the quaint garret in the House of the Seven Gables, from which Phœbe Pyncheon watched the singular idiosyncrasies of the superannuated breed of fowls in the garden. The garret and the pump are designed in strict subordination to the human figures: the tower and the fountain have a distinctive purpose of their own. Hawthorne, at any rate, seems to have been mastered by his too powerful auxiliaries. A human soul, even in America, is more interesting to us than all the churches and picture-galleries in the world; and, therefore, it is as well that Hawthorne should not be tempted to the too easy method of putting fine description in place of sentiment.

But how was the task to be performed? How was the imaginative glow to be shed over the

American scenery, so provokingly raw and deficient in harmony? A similar problem was successfully solved by a writer whose development, in proportion to her means of cultivation, is about the most remarkable of recent literary phenomena. Miss Brontë's bleak Yorkshire moors, with their uncompromising stone walls, and the valleys invaded by factories, are at first sight as little suited to romance as New England itself, to which, indeed, both the inhabitants and the country have a decided family resemblance. Now that she has discovered for us the fountains of poetic interest, we can all see that the region is not a mere stony wilderness; but it is well worth while to make a pilgrimage to Haworth, if only to discover how little the country corresponds to our preconceived impressions, or, in other words, how much depends upon the eye which sees it, and how little upon its intrinsic merits. Miss Brontë's marvellous effects are obtained by the process which enables an "intense and glowing mind" to see everything through its own atmosphere. The ugliest and most trivial objects seem, like objects heated by the sun, to radiate back the glow of passion with which she has regarded them. Perhaps this singular power is still more conspicuous in *Villette*, where she had even less of the raw material of poetry. An odd parallel may be

found between one of the most striking passages in *Villette* and one in *Transformation*. Lucy Snowe in one novel, and Hilda in the other, are left to pass a summer vacation, the one in Brussels and the other in pestiferous Rome. Miss Snowe has no external cause of suffering but the natural effect of solitude upon a homeless and helpless governess. Hilda has to bear about with her the weight of a terrible secret, affecting, it may be, even the life of her dearest friend. Each of them wanders into a Roman Catholic church, and each, though they have both been brought up in a Protestant home, seeks relief at the confessional. So far the cases are alike, though Hilda, one might have fancied, has by far the strongest cause for emotion. And yet, after reading the two descriptions—both excellent in their way—one might fancy that the two young ladies had exchanged burdens. Lucy Snowe is as tragic as the innocent confidante of a murderess; Hilda's feelings never seem to rise above that weary sense of melancholy isolation which besieges us in a deserted city. It is needless to ask which is the best bit of work artistically considered. Hawthorne's style is more graceful and flexible; his descriptions of the Roman Catholic ceremonial and its influence upon an imaginative mind in distress are far more sympathetic, and imply

wider range of intellect. But Hilda scarcely moves us like Lucy. There is too much delicate artistic description of picture-galleries and of the glories of St. Peter's to allow the poor little American girl to come prominently to the surface. We have been indulging with her in some sad but charming speculations, and not witnessing the tragedy of a deserted soul. Lucy Snowe has very inferior materials at her command; but somehow we are moved by a sympathetic thrill: we taste the bitterness of the awful cup of despair which, as she tells us, is forced to her lips in the night-watches; and are not startled when so prosaic an object as the row of beds in the dormitory of a French school suggests to her images worthy of rather stately tombs in the aisles of a vast cathedral, and recalls dead dreams of an elder world and a mightier race long frozen in death. Comparisons of this kind are almost inevitably unfair; but the difference between the two illustrates one characteristic—we need not regard it as a defect—of Hawthorne. His idealism does not consist in conferring grandeur upon vulgar objects by tinging them with the reflection of deep emotion. He rather shrinks than otherwise from describing the strongest passions, or shows their working by indirect touches and under a side-light. An excellent example of his peculiar

method occurs in what is in some respects the most perfect of his works, the *Scarlet Letter*. There, again, we have the spectacle of a man tortured by a life-long repentance. The Puritan Clergyman, reverenced as a saint by all his flock, conscious of a sin which, once revealed, will crush him to the earth, watched with a malignant purpose by the husband whom he has injured, unable to summon up the moral courage to tear off the veil, and make the only atonement in his power, is a singularly striking figure, powerfully conceived and most delicately described. He yields under terrible pressure to the temptation of escaping from the scene of his prolonged torture with the partner of his guilt. And then, as he is returning homewards after yielding a reluctant consent to the flight, we are invited to contemplate the agony of his soul. The form which it takes is curiously characteristic. No vehement pangs of remorse, or desperate hopes of escape overpower his faculties in any simple and straightforward fashion. The poor minister is seized with a strange hallucination. He meets a venerable deacon, and can scarcely restrain himself from uttering blasphemies about the Communion-supper. Next appears an aged widow, and he longs to assail her with what appears to him to be an unanswerable argument against the immortality

of the soul. Then follows an impulse to whisper impure suggestions to a fair young maiden, whom he has recently converted. And, finally, he longs to greet a rough sailor with a "volley of good, round, solid, satisfactory, and heaven-defying oaths." The minister, in short, is in that state of mind which gives birth in its victim to a belief in diabolical possession; and the meaning is pointed by an encounter with an old lady, who, in the popular belief, was one of Satan's miserable slaves and dupes, the witches, and is said—for Hawthorne never introduces the supernatural without toning it down by a supposed legendary transmission—to have invited him to meet her at the blasphemous Sabbath in the forest. The sin of endeavouring to escape from the punishment of his sins had brought him into sympathy with wicked mortals and perverted spirits.

This mode of setting forth the agony of a pure mind tainted by one irremovable blot, is undoubtedly impressive to the imagination in a high degree; far more impressive, we may safely say, than any quantity of such rant as very inferior writers could have poured out with the utmost facility on such an occasion. Yet it might possibly be mentioned that a poet of the highest order would have produced the effect by more direct means. Remorse overpowering and ab-

sorbing does not embody itself in these recondite and, one may almost say, over-ingenious fancies. Hawthorne does not give us so much the pure passion as some of its collateral effects. He is still more interested in the curious psychological problem than moved by sympathy with the torture of the soul. We pity poor Mr. Dimmesdale profoundly, but we are also interested in him as the subject of an experiment in analytical psychology. We do not care so much for his emotions as for the strange phantoms which are raised in his intellect by the disturbance of his natural functions. The man is placed upon the rack, but our compassion is aroused, not by feeling our own nerves and sinews twitching in sympathy, but by remarking the strange confusion of ideas produced in his mind, the singularly distorted aspect of things in general introduced by such an experience, and hence, if we please, inferring the keenest of the pangs which have produced them. This turn of thought explains the real meaning of Hawthorne's antipathy to poor John Bull. That worthy gentleman, we will admit, is in a sense more gross and beefy than his American cousin. His nerves are stronger, for we need not decide whether they should be called coarser or less morbid. He is not, in the proper sense of the word, less imaginative, for a vigorous

grasp of realities is rather a proof of a powerful than a defective imagination. But he is less accessible to those delicate impulses which are to the ordinary passions as electricity to heat. His imagination is more intense and less mobile. The devils which haunt the two races partake of the national characteristics. John Bunyan, Dimmesdale's contemporary, suffered under the pangs of a remorse equally acute, though with apparently far less cause. The devils who tormented him whispered blasphemies in his ears; they pulled at his clothes; they persuaded him that he had committed the unpardonable sin. They caused the very stones in the streets and tiles on the houses, as he says, to band themselves together against him. But they had not the refined and humorous ingenuity of the American fiends. They tempted him, as their fellows tempted Dimmesdale, to sell his soul; but they were too much in earnest to insist upon queer breaches of decorum. They did not indulge in that quaint play of fancy which tempts us to believe that the devils in New England had seduced the "tricksy spirit," Ariel, to indulge in practical jokes at the expense of a nobler victim than Stephano or Caliban. They were too terribly diabolical to care whether Bunyan blasphemed in solitude or in the presence of human

respectabilities. Bunyan's sufferings were as poetical, but less conducive to refined speculation. His were the fiends that haunt the valley of the shadow of death; whereas Hawthorne's are to be encountered in the dim regions of twilight, where realities blend inextricably with mere phantoms, and the mind confers only a kind of provisional existence upon the "airy nothings" of its creation. Apollyon does not appear armed to the teeth and throwing fiery darts, but comes as an unsubstantial shadow threatening vague and undefined dangers, and only half-detaching himself from the background of darkness. He is as intangible as Milton's Death, not the vivid reality which presented itself to mediæval imaginations.

This special attitude of mind is probably easier to the American than to the English imagination. The craving for something substantial, whether in cookery or in poetry, was that which induced Hawthorne to keep John Bull rather at arm's length. We may trace the working of similar tendencies in other American peculiarities. Spiritualism and its attendant superstitions are the gross and vulgar form of the same phase of thought as it occurs in men of highly-strung nerves but defective cultivation. Hawthorne always speaks of these modern goblins with the contempt they deserve, for they shocked his imagination as

much as his reason; but he likes to play with fancies which are not altogether dissimilar, though his refined taste warns him that they become disgusting when grossly translated into tangible symbols. Mesmerism, for example, plays an important part in the *Blithedale Romance* and the *House of the Seven Gables*, though judiciously softened and kept in the background. An example of the danger of such tendencies may be found in those works of Edgar Poe, in which he seems to have had recourse to strong stimulants to rouse a flagging imagination. What is exquisitely fanciful and airy in Hawthorne is too often replaced in his rival by an attempt to overpower us by dabblings in the charnel-house and prurient appeals to our fears of the horribly revolting. After reading some of Poe's stories one feels a kind of shock to one's modesty. We require some kind of spiritual ablution to cleanse our minds of his disgusting images; whereas Hawthorne's pure and delightful fancies, though at times they may have led us too far from the healthy contact of everyday interests, never leave a stain upon the imagination, and generally succeed in throwing a harmonious colouring upon some objects in which we had previously failed to recognise the beautiful. To perform that duty effectually is perhaps the highest of artistic merits; and though we may

complain of Hawthorne's colouring as too evanescent, its charm grows upon us the more we study it.

Hawthorne seems to have been slow in discovering the secret of his own power. The *Twice-Told Tales*, he tells us, are only a fragmentary selection from a great number which had an ephemeral existence in long-forgotten magazines, and were sentenced to extinction by their author. Though many of the survivors are very striking, no wise reader will regret that sentence. It could be wished that other authors were as ready to bury their innocents, and that injudicious admirers might always abstain from acting as resurrection-men. The fragments, which remain with all their merits, are chiefly interesting as illustrating the intellectual development of their author. Hawthorne, in his preface to the collected edition (all Hawthorne's prefaces are remarkably instructive) tells us what to think of them. The book, he says, "requires to be read in the clear brown twilight atmosphere in which it was written; if opened in the sunshine it is apt to look exceedingly like a volume of blank pages." The remark, with deductions on the score of modesty, is more or less applicable to all his writings. But he explains, and with perfect truth, that though written in solitude, the book has not the abstruse tone which marks the

written communications of a solitary mind with itself. The reason is that the sketches "are not the talk of a secluded man with his own mind and heart, but his attempts . . . to open an intercourse with the world." They may, in fact, be compared to Brummel's failures; and, though they do not display the perfect grace and fitness which would justify him in presenting himself to society, they were well worth taking up to illustrate the skill of the master's manipulation. We see him trying various experiments to hit off that delicate mean between the fanciful and the prosaic, which shall satisfy his taste and be intelligible to the outside world. Sometimes he gives us a fragment of historical romance, as in the story of the stern old regicide who suddenly appears from the woods to head the colonists of Massachusetts in a critical emergency; then he tries his hand at a bit of allegory, and describes the search for the mythical carbuncle which blazes by its inherent splendour on the face of a mysterious cliff in the depths of the untrodden wilderness, and lures old and young, the worldly and the romantic, to waste their lives in the vain effort to discover it —for the carbuncle is the ideal which mocks our pursuit, and may be our curse or our blessing. Then perhaps we have a domestic piece—a quiet description of a New England country scene,

touched with a grace which reminds us of the creators of Sir Roger de Coverley or the Vicar of Wakefield. Occasionally there is a fragment of pure *diablerie*, as in the story of the lady who consults the witch in the hollow of the three hills; and more frequently he tries to work out one of those strange psychological problems which he afterwards treated with more fulness of power. The minister who, for an unexplained reason, puts on a black veil one morning in his youth, and wears it until he is laid with it in his grave—a kind of symbolic prophecy of Dimmesdale; the eccentric Wakefield (whose original, if I remember rightly, is to be found in *King's Anecdotes*), who leaves his house one morning for no particular reason, and though living in the next street, does not reveal his existence to his wife for twenty years; and the hero of the *Wedding Knell* the elderly bridegroom whose early love has jilted him, but agrees to marry him when she is an elderly widow and he an old bachelor, and who appals the marriage party by coming to the church in his shroud, with the bell tolling as for a funeral—all these bear the unmistakable stamp of Hawthorne's mint, and each is a study of his favourite subject, the borderland between reason and insanity. In many of these stories appears the element of interest, to which Hawthorne clung the more closely

both from early associations and because it is the one undeniable poetical element in the American character. Shallow-minded people fancy Puritanism to be prosaic, because the laces and ruffles of the Cavaliers are a more picturesque costume at a masked ball than the dress of the Roundheads. The Puritan has become a grim and ugly scarecrow, on whom every buffoon may break his jest. But the genuine old Puritan spirit ceases to be picturesque only because of its sublimity: its poetry is sublimed into religion. The great poet of the Puritans fails, as far as he fails, when he tries to transcend the limits of mortal imagination—

> The living throne, the sapphire blaze,
> Where angels tremble as they gaze,
> He saw: but blasted with excess of light,
> Closed his eyes in endless night.

To represent the Puritan from within was not, indeed, a task suitable to Hawthorne's powers. Carlyle has done that for us with more congenial sentiment than could have been well felt by the gentle romancer. Hawthorne fancies the grey shadow of a stern old forefather wondering at his degenerate son. "A writer of story-books! What kind of business in life, what mode of glorifying God, or being serviceable to mankind in his day

and generation, may that be? Why, the degenerate fellow might as well have been a fiddler!" And yet the old strain remains, though strangely modified by time and circumstance. In Hawthorne it would seem that the peddling element of the old Puritans had been reduced to its lowest point; the more spiritual element had been refined till it is probable enough that the ancestral shadow would have refused to recognise the connection. The old dogmatical framework to which he attached such vast importance had dropped out of his descendant's mind, and had been replaced by dreamy speculation, obeying no laws save those imposed by its own sense of artistic propriety. But we may often recognise, even where we cannot express in words, the strange family likeness which exists in characteristics which are superficially antagonistic. The man of action may be bound by subtilities to the speculative metaphysician; and Hawthorne's mind, amidst the most obvious differences, had still an affinity to his remote forefathers. Their bugbears had become his playthings; but the witches, though they have no reality, have still a fascination for him. The interest which he feels in them, even in their now shadowy state, is a proof that he would have believed in them in good earnest a century and a half earlier. The

imagination, working in a different intellectual atmosphere, is unable to project its images upon the external world; but it still forms them in the old shape. His solitary musings necessarily employ a modern dialect, but they often turn on the same topics which occurred to Jonathan Edwards in the woods of Connecticut. Instead of the old Puritan speculations about predestination and free-will, he dwells upon the transmission by natural laws of an hereditary curse, and upon the strange blending of good and evil, which may cause sin to be an awakening impulse in a human soul. The change which takes place in Donatello in consequence of his crime is a modern symbol of the fall of man and the eating the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. As an artist he gives concrete images instead of abstract theories; but his thoughts evidently delight to dwell in the same regions where the daring speculations of his theological ancestors took their origin. Septimius, the rather disagreeable hero of his last romance, is a peculiar example of a similar change. Brought up under the strict discipline of New England, he has retained the love of musing upon insoluble mysteries, though he has abandoned the old dogmatic guide-posts. When such a man finds that the orthodox scheme of the universe provided by his official pastors has somehow

broken down with him, he forms some audacious theory of his own, and is perhaps plunged into an unhallowed revolt against the divine order. Septimius, under such circumstances, develops into a kind of morbid and sullen Hawthorne. He considers—as other people have done—that death is a disagreeable fact, but refuses to admit that it is inevitable. The romance tends to show that such a state of mind is unhealthy and dangerous, and Septimius is contrasted unfavourably with the vigorous natures who preserve their moral balance by plunging into the stream of practical life. Yet Hawthorne necessarily sympathises with the abnormal being whom he creates. Septimius illustrates the dangers of the musing temperament, but the dangers are produced by a combination of an essentially selfish nature with the meditative tendency. Hawthorne, like his hero, sought refuge from the hard facts of commonplace life by retiring into a visionary world. He delights in propounding much the same questions as those which tormented poor Septimius, though for obvious reasons, he did not try to compound an elixir of life by means of a recipe handed down from Indian ancestors. The strange mysteries in which the world and our nature are shrouded are always present to his imagination; he catches dim glimpses of the laws which bring out strange

harmonies, but, on the whole, tend rather to deepen than to clear the mysteries. He loves the marvellous, not in the vulgar sense of the word, but as a symbol of perplexity which encounters every thoughtful man in his journey through life. Similiar tenants at an earlier period might, with almost equal probability, have led him to the stake as a dabbler in forbidden sciences, or have caused him to be revered as one to whom a deep spiritual instinct had been granted.

Meanwhile, as it was his calling to tell stories to readers of the English language in the nineteenth century, his power is exercised in a different sphere. No modern writer has the same skill in so using the marvellous as to interest without unduly exciting our incredulity. He makes, indeed, no positive demands on our credulity. The strange influences which are suggested rather than obtruded upon us are kept in the background, so as not to invite, nor indeed to render possible, the application of scientific tests. We may compare him once more to Miss Brontë, who introduces, in *Villette*, a haunted garden. She shows us a ghost who is for a moment a very terrible spectre indeed, and then, very much to our annoyance, rationalises him into a flesh-and-blood lover. Hawthorne would neither have allowed the ghost to intrude so forcibly, nor have expelled

him so decisively. The garden in his hands would have been haunted by a shadowy terror of which we could render no precise account to ourselves. It would have refrained from actual contact with professors and governesses; and as it would never have taken bodily form, it would never have been quite dispelled. His ghosts are confined to their proper sphere, the twilight of the mind, and never venture into the broad glare of daylight. We can see them so long as we do not gaze directly at them; when we turn to examine them they are gone, and we are left in doubt whether they were realities or an ocular delusion generated in our fancy by some accidental collocation of half-seen objects. So in the *House of the Seven Gables* we may hold what opinion we please as to the reality of the curse which hangs over the Pyncheons and the strange connection between them and their hereditary antagonists; in the *Scarlet Letter* we may, if we like, hold that there was really more truth in the witch legends which colour the imaginations of the actors than we are apt to dream of in our philosophy; and in *Transformation* we are left finally in doubt as to the great question of Donatello's ears, and the mysterious influence which he retains over the animal world so long as he is unstained by bloodshed. In *Septimius* alone, it seems to me that the

supernatural is left in rather too obtrusive a shape in spite of the final explanations; though it might possibly have been toned down had the story received the last touches of the author. The artifice, if so it may be called, by which this is effected —and the romance is just sufficiently dipped in the shadow of the marvellous to be heightened without becoming offensive—sounds, like other things, tolerably easy when it is explained; and yet the difficulty is enormous, as may appear on reflection as well as from the extreme rarity of any satisfactory work in the same style by other artists. With the exception of a touch or two in Scott's stories, such as the impressive Bodach Glas, in *Waverley*, and the apparition in the exquisite *Bride of Lammermoor*, it would be difficult to discover any parallel.

In fact Hawthorne was able to tread in that magic circle only by an exquisite refinement of taste, and by a delicate sense of humour, which is the best preservative against all extravagance. Both qualities combine in that tender delineation of character which is, after all, one of his greatest charms. His Puritan blood shows itself in sympathy, not with the stern side of the ancestral creed, but with the feebler characters upon whom it weighed as an oppressive terror. He resembles, in some degree, poor Clifford Pyncheon, whose

love of the beautiful makes him suffer under the stronger will of his relatives and the prim stiffness of their home. He exhibits the suffering of such a character all the more effectively because, with his kindly compassion there is mixed a delicate flavour of irony. The more tragic scenes affect us, perhaps, with less sense of power; the playful, though melancholy, fancy seems to be less at home when the more powerful emotions are to be excited; and yet once, at least, he draws one of those pictures which engrave themselves instantaneously on the memory. The grimmest or most passionate of writers could hardly have improved the scene where the body of the magnificent Zenobia is discovered in the river. Every touch goes straight to the mark. The narrator of the story, accompanied by the man whose coolness has caused the suicide, and the shrewd, unimaginative Yankee farmer, who interprets into coarse, downright language the suspicions which they fear to confess to themselves, are sounding the depths of the river by night in a leaky punt with a long pole. Silas Foster represents the brutal, commonplace comments of the outside world, which jar so terribly on the more sensitive and closely interested actors in the tragedy.

Heigho! [he soliloquises, with offensive loudness], life and death together make sad work for us all.

Then I was a boy, bobbing for fish; and now I'm getting to be an old fellow, and here I be, groping for a dead body! I tell you what lads, if I thought anything had really happened to Zenobia, I should feel kind o' sorrowful.

That is the discordant chorus of the grave-diggers in *Hamlet.* At length the body is found, and poor Zenobia is brought to the shore with her knees still bent in the attitude of prayer, and her hands clenched in immitigable defiance. Foster tries in vain to straighten the dead limbs. As the teller of the story gazes at her, the grimly ludicrous reflection occurs to him that if Zenobia had foreseen all "the ugly circumstances of death —how ill it would become her, the altogether unseemly aspect which she must put on, and especially old Silas Foster's efforts to improve the matter—she would no more have committed the dreadful act than have exhibited herself to a public assembly in a badly-fitting garment."

# Balzac's Novels

Balzac exacts more attention than most novel-readers are inclined to give; he is often repulsive, and not unfrequently dull; but the student who has once submitted to his charm becomes spell-bound. Disgusted for a moment, he returns again and again to the strange, hideous, grotesque, but most interesting world to which Balzac alone can introduce him. Like the opium-eater, he acquires a taste for the visions that are conjured up before him with so vivid a colouring, that he almost believes in their objective existence. There are perhaps greater novelists than Balzac; there are many who preach a purer morality; and many who give a far greater impression of general intellectual force; but in this one quality of intense realisation of actors and scenery he is unique.

Balzac, indeed, was apparently himself almost incapable of distinguishing his dreams from realities. Great wits, we know, are allied to madness; and the boundaries seem in his case to have been most shadowy and indistinct. Indeed, if

the anecdotes reported of him be accurate—some of them are doubtless rather overcharged—he must have lived almost in a state of permanent hallucination. This, for example, is a characteristic story. He inhabited for some years a house called *les Jardies*, in the neighbourhood of Paris. He had a difficulty in providing material furniture, owing to certain debts, which, as some sceptics insinuated, were themselves a vast mystification. He habitually ascribed his poverty to a certain "deficit Kessner," a loss which reposed on some trifling foundation of facts, but which assumed monstrous proportions in his imagination, and recurred perpetually as the supposed cause of his poverty. In sober reality, however, he was poor, and found compensation in creating a vast credit, as imaginary as his liabilities. Upon that bank he could draw without stint. He therefore inscribed in one place upon the bare walls of his house, "Ici un revêtement de marbre de Paros;" in another, "Ici un plafond peint par Eugène Delacroix;" in a third, "Ici des portes, façon Trianon;" and, in short, revelled in gorgeous decorations made of the same materials as the dishes of the Barmecides' feast. A minor source of wealth was the single walnut-tree which really grew in his gardens, and which increased his dream-revenue by 60*l.* a year. This extra-

ordinary result was due, not to any merit in the nuts, but to an ancient and imaginary custom of the village which compelled the inhabitants to deposit round its foot a material defined by Victor Hugo as "du guano moins les oiseaux." The most singular story, however, and which we presume is to be received with a certain reserve, tells how he roused two of his intimate friends at two o'clock one morning, and urged them to start for India without an hour's delay. The cause of this journey was that a certain German historian had presented Balzac with a seal valued by the thoughtless at the sum of six sous. The ring, however, had a singular history in Balzac's dreamland. It was impressed with the seal of the Prophet, and had been stolen by the English from the Great Mogul. Balzac had or had not been informed by the Turkish ambassador that that potentate would repurchase it with tons of gold and diamonds, and was benevolent enough to propose that his friend should share in the stores which would exceed the dreams of Aladdin.

How far these and other such fancies were a merely humorous protest against the harsh realities of life, may be a matter of speculation; but it is less doubtful that the fictitious personages with whom Balzac surrounded himself lived and moved in his imagination as distinctly as the

flesh-and-blood realities who were treading the pavement of Paris. He did not so much invent characters and situations as watch his imaginary world, and compile the memories of its celebrities. All English readers are acquainted with the little circle of clergymen and wives who inhabit the town of Barchester. Balzac has carried out the same device on a gigantic scale. He has peopled not a country town but a metropolis. There is a whole society, with the members of which we are intimate, whose family secrets are revealed to us, and who drop in, as it were, in every novel of a long series, as if they were old friends. When, for example, young Victurnien d'Esgrignon comes to Paris he makes acquaintance, we are told, with De Marsay, Maxime de Trailles, Les Lupeaulx, Rastignac, Vandenesse, Ajuda-Pinto, the Duchesses de Grandlieu, de Carigliano, de Chaulieu, the Marquises d'Espard, d'Aiglemont, and De Listomère, Madame Firmiani, the Comtesse de Sérizy, and various other heads of the fashionable world. Every one of these special characters has a special history. He or she appears as the hero or heroine of one story, and plays subsidiary parts in a score of others. They recall to us innumerable scandalous episodes, with which anybody who lives in the imaginary society of Balzac's Paris feels it a duty to be as familiar as a back-stairs politician with the

gossip of the House of Commons. The list just given is a mere fragment of the great circle to which Balzac introduces us. The history of their performances is intimately connected with the history of the time; nay, it is sometimes essential to a full comprehension of recent events. Bishop Proudie, we fear, would scarcely venture to take an active part in the Roman Catholic emancipation; he would be dissolved into thin air by contact with more substantial forms; but if you would appreciate the intrigues which were going on at Paris during the campaign of Marengo, you must study the conversations which took place between Talleyrand, Fouché, Sieyès, Carnot, and Malin, and their relations to that prince of policemen, the well-known Corentin. De Marsay, we are told, with audacious precision of time and place, was President of the Council in 1833. There is no tendency on the part of these spectres to shrink from the light. They rub shoulders with the most celebrated statesmen, and mingle in every event of the time. One is driven to believe that Balzac really fancied the banker Nucingen to be as tangible as a Rothschild, and was convinced that the conversations of Louis XVIII. with Vandenesse were historic facts. His sister tells us that he discussed the behaviour of his own creations with the utmost gravity, and was intensely

interested in discovering their fate, and getting the earliest information as to the alliances which they were about to form. It is a curious question, upon which I cannot profess to speak positively, whether this voluminous story ever comes into hopeless conflict with dates. I have some suspicions that the brilliant journalist, Blondet, was married and unmarried at the same period; but, considering his very loose mode of life, the suspicion, if true, is susceptible of explanation. Such study as I have made has not revealed any case of inconsistency; and Balzac evidently has the whole secret (for it seems harsh to call it fictitious) history of the time so completely at his fingers' ends, that the effect upon the reader is to produce an unhesitating confidence. If a blunder occurs one would rather believe in a slip of the pen, such as happens to real historians, not in the substantial inaccuracy of the narrative. Sir A. Alison, it may be remembered, brings Sir Peregrine Pickle to the Duke of Wellington's funeral, which must have occurred after Sir Peregrine's death; and Balzac's imaginary narrative may not be perfectly free from anachronism. But, if so, I have not found him out. Everybody must sympathise with the English lady who is said to have written to Paris for the address of that most imposing physician, Horace Bianchion.

The startling realisation may be due in part to a mere literary trick. We meet with artifices like those by which De Foe cheats us into forgetfulness of his true character. One of the best known is the insertion of superfluous bits of information, by way of entrapping his readers into the inference that they could only have been given because they were true. The snare is more worthy of a writer of begging-letters than of a genuine artist. Balzac occasionally indulges in somewhat similar devices; little indirect allusions to his old characters are thrown in with a calculated nonchalance; we have bits of antiquarian information as to the history of buildings; superfluous accounts of the coats-of-arms of the principal families concerned, and anecdotes as to their ancestry; and, after he has given us a name, he sometimes takes care to explain that the pronunciation is different from the spelling. As a rule, however, these irrelevant minutiæ seem to be thrown in, not by way of tricking us, but because he has so genuine an interest in his own personages. He is as anxious to set De Marsay or the Père Goriot distinctly before us, as Carlyle to make us acquainted with Frederick or Cromwell. Our most vivid painter of historical portraits is not more charmed to discover a characteristic incident in the life of his heroes, or to describe the pimples on his face, or

the specks of blood on his collar, than Balzac to do the same duty for the creations of his fancy. De Foe may be compared to those favourites of showmen who cheat you into mistaking a flat-wall painting for a bas-relief. Balzac is one of the patient Dutch artists who exhaust inconceivable skill and patience in painting every hair on the head and every wrinkle on the face till their work has a photographic accuracy. The result, it must be confessed, is sometimes rather trying to the patience. Balzac's artistic instinct, indeed, renders every separate touch more or less conducive to the general effect; but he takes an unconscionable time in preparing his ground. Instead of launching boldly into his story, and leaving his characters to speak for themselves, he begins, as it were, by taking his automatons carefully to pieces, and pointing out all their wires and springs. He leaves nothing unaccounted for. He explains the character of each actor as he comes upon the stage; and, not content with making general remarks, he plunges with extraordinary relish into the minutest personal details. In particular, we know just how much money everybody has got, and how he has got it. Balzac absolutely revels in elaborate financial statements. And constantly, just as we hope that the action is about to begin, he catches us, as it were, by the button-hole, and

begs us to wait a minute to listen to a few more preparatory remarks. In one or two of the stories, as, for example, in the *Maison Nucingen*, the introduction seems to fill the whole book. After expecting some catastrophe, we gradually become aware that Balzac has thought it necessary to give us a conscientious explanation of some very dull commercial intrigues, in order to fill up gaps in other stories of the cycle. Some one might possibly ask, what was the precise origin of this great failure of which we hear so much, and Balzac resolves that he shall have as complete an answer as though he were an accountant drawing up a balance-sheet. It is said, I know not on what authority, that his story of *César Birotteau* has, in fact, been quoted in French courts as illustrating the law of bankruptcy; and the details given are so ample, and, to English readers at least, so wearisome, that it really reads more like a legal statement of a case than a novel. As another example of this elaborate workmanship I may quote the remarkable story of *Les Paysans*. It is intended to illustrate the character of the French peasant, his profound avarice and cunning, and his bitter jealousy, which forms a whole district into a tacit conspiracy against the rich, held together by closer bonds than those of a Fenian lodge. Balzac resolves that we shall have

the whole scene and all the actors distinctly before us. We have a description of a country-house, more poetical, but far more detailed, than one in an auctioneer's circular; then we have a photograph of the neighbouring *cabaret;* then a minute description of its inhabitants, and a detailed statement of their ways and means. The story here makes a feeble start; but Balzac recollects that we don't quite know the origin of the quarrel on which it depends, and, therefore, elaborately describes the former proprietor, points out precisely how she was cheated by her bailiff, and precisely to what amount, and throws in descriptions of two or three supplementary persons. We now make another start in the history of the quarrel; but this immediately throws us back into a minute description of the old bailiff's family circumstances, of the characters of several of his connections, and of the insidious villain who succeeds him. Then we have a careful financial statement of the second proprietor's losses, and the commercial system which favours them; this leads to some antiquarian details concerning the bailiff's house, and to detailed portraits of each of the four guards who are set to watch over the property. Then Balzac remarks that we cannot possibly understand the quarrel without understanding fully the complicated family relations,

owing to which the officials of the department form what in America would be called a "ring." By this time we are half way through the volume, and the promised story is still in its infancy. Even Balzac makes an apology for his *longueurs*, and tries to set to work in greater earnest. He is so much interrupted, however, by the necessity of elaborately introducing every new actor, and all his or her relations, and the houses in which they live, and their commercial and social position, that the essence of the story has at last to be compressed into half-a-dozen pages. In short, the novel resolves itself into a series of sketches; and reading it is like turning over a set of photographs, with letterpress descriptions at intervals. Or we may compare it to one of those novels of real life, so strange to the English mind, in which a French indictment sums up the whole previous history of the persons accused, accumulates every possible bit of information which may or may not throw light upon the facts, and diverges from the point, as English lawyers would imagine, into the most irrelevant considerations.

Balzac, it is plain, differs widely from our English authors, who generally slightly despise their own art, and think that, in providing amusement for our idle hours, they are rather derogating from their dignity. Instead of claiming our attention as

a right, they try to entice us into interest by every possible artifice: they give us exciting glimpses of horrors to come; they are restlessly anxious to get their stories well under way. Balzac is far more confident in his position. He never doubts that we shall be willing to study his works with the seriousness due to a scientific treatise. And occasionally, when he is seized by a sudden and most deplorable fit of morality, he becomes as dull as a sermon. The gravity with which he sets before us all the benevolent schemes of the *médecin de campagne*, and describes the whole charitable machinery of the district, makes his performance as dismal as a gigantic religious tract. But when, in his happier and wickeder moods, he turns this amazing capacity of graphic description to its true account, the power of his method makes itself manifest. Every bit of elaborate geographical and financial information has its meaning, and tells with accumulated force on the final result. I may instance, for example, the descriptions of Paris, which form the indispensable background to the majority of his stories, and contribute in no inconsiderable share to their tragic effect. Balzac had to deal with the Paris of the Restoration, full of strange tortuous streets and picturesque corners, of swinging lanterns and defective drainage; the Paris which inevitably suggested barricades and street massacres, and was impregnated to the

core with old historical associations. It had not yet lowered itself to the comprehension of New Yorkers, and still offered such scenery as Gustave Doré has caught in his wonderful illustrations of the *Contes Drolatiques*. Its mysterious and not overcleanly charm lives in the pages of Balzac, and harmonises with the strange society which he has created to people its streets. Thus, in one of his most audacious stories, where the horribly grotesque trembles on the verge of the ridiculous, he strikes the keynote by an elegant apostrophe to Paris. There are, he tells us, a few connoisseurs who enjoy the Parisian flavour like the bouquet of some delicate wine. To all Paris is a marvel; to them it is a living creature; every man, every fragment of a house, is "part of the cellular tissue of this great courtesan, whose head, heart, and fantastic manners are thoroughly known to them." They are lovers of Paris; to them it is a costly luxury to travel in Paris. They are incessantly arrested before the dramas, the disasters, the picturesque accidents, which assail one in the midst of this moving queen of cities. They start in the morning to go to its extremities, and find themselves still unable to leave its centre at dinner-time. It is a marvellous spectacle at all times; but, he exclaims:

O Paris! qui n'a pas admiré tes sombres paysages,

tes échappées de lumière, tes culs-de-sac profonds et silencieux; qui n'a pas entendu tes murmures entre minuit et deux heures du matin, ne connaît encore rien de ta vraie poésie, ni de tes bizarres et larges contrastes.

In the scenes which follow, we are introduced to a lover watching the beautiful and virtuous object of his adoration as she descends an infamous street late in the evening, and enters one of the houses through a damp, moist, and fetid passage, feebly lighted by a trembling lamp, beneath which are seen the hideous face and skinny fingers of an old woman, as fitly placed as the witches in the blasted heath in *Macbeth*. In this case, however, Balzac is in one of his wildest moods, and the hideous mysteries of a hugh capital become the pretext for a piece of rather ludicrous melodrama. Paris is full enough of tragedies without the preposterous beggar Ferragus, who appears at balls as a distinguished diplomat, and manages to place on a young gentleman's head of hair a slow poison (invented for the purpose), which brings him to an early grave. More impressive, because less extravagant, is that Maison Vauquer, every hole and corner of which is familiar to the real student of Balzac. It is situated, as everybody should know, in the Rue Neuve St.-Geneviève, just where it descends so steeply towards the Rue de l'Arbalète that horses have some trouble in climbing it.

We know its squalid exterior, its creaking bell, the wall painted to represent an arcade in green marble, the crumbling statue of Cupid, with half effaced inscription—

> Qui que tu sois, voici ton maître,—
> Il l'est, le fut, ou le doit être.

We have visited the wretched garden with its scanty pot-herbs and scarecrow beds, and the green benches in the miserable arbour, where the lodgers who are rich enough to enjoy such a luxury indulge in a cup of coffee after dinner. The salon, with its greasy and worn-out furniture, every bit of which is catalogued, is as familiar as our own studies. We know the exact geography even of the larder and the cistern. We catch the odour of the damp, close office, where Madame Vauquer lurks like a human spider. She is the animating genius of the place, and we know the exact outline of her figure, and every article of her dress. The minuteness of her portrait brings out the horrors of the terrible process by which poor Goriot gradually sinks from one step to another of the social ladder, and simultaneously ascends from the first floor to the garrets. We can track his steps and trace his agony. Each station of that melancholy pilgrimage is painted, down to the minutest details, with unflinching fidelity.

Paris, says Balzac, is an ocean; however painfully you explore it and sound its depths, there are still virgin corners, unknown caves, with their flowers, pearls, and monsters, forgotten by literary divers. The Maison Vauquer is one of these singular monstrosities. No one, at any rate, can complain that Balzac has not done his best to describe and analyse the character of the unknown social species which it contains. It absorbs our interest by the contrast of its vulgar and intensely commonplace exterior with the terrible passions and sufferings of which it is the appropriate scene.

The horrors of a great metropolis, indeed, give ample room for tragedy. Old Sandy Mackaye takes Alton Locke to the entrance of a London alley, and tells the sentimental tailor to write poetry about that.

> Say how ye saw the mouth o' hell, and the twa pillars thereof at the entry, the pawnbroker's shop on the one side and the gin-palace at the other—two monstrous deevils, eating up men, women, and bairns, body and soul. Look at the jaws o' the monsters, how they open and open to swallow in anither victim and anither. Write about that!

The poor tailor complains that it is unpoetical, and Mackaye replies:

> Hah! is there no the heaven above them here and

the hell beneath them? and God frowning and the deevil grinning? No poetry there! Is no the verra idee of the classic tragedy defined to be—man conquered by circumstances? Canna ye see it here?

But the quotation must stop, for Mackaye goes on to a moral not quite according to Balzac. Balzac, indeed, was anything but a Christian socialist, or a Radical reformer; we don't often catch sight in his pages of God frowning or the devil grinning; his world seems to be pretty well forgotten by the one, and its inhabitants to be quite able to dispense with the services of the other. Paris, he tells us in his most outrageous story, is a hell, which one day may have its Dante. The prolétaire lives in its lowest circle, and seldom comes into Balzac's pages except as representing the half-seen horrors of the gulf reserved for that corrupt and brilliant society whose vices he loves to describe. A summary of his creed is given by a queer contrast to Mackaye, the accomplished and able De Marsay. People speak, he says, of the immorality of certain books; here is a horrible, foul, and corrupt book, always open and never to be shut; the great book of the world; and beyond that is another book a thousand times more dangerous, which consists of all that is whispered by one man to another, or discussed under ladies' fans at balls. Balzac's pages are flavoured, rather

to excess, with this diabolical spice, composed of dark allusions to, or audacious revelations of, these hideous mysteries. If he is wanting in the moral elevation necessary for a Dante, he has some of the sinister power which makes him a fit guide to the horrors of our modern Inferno.

Before accepting Balzac's guidance into these mysterious regions I must touch upon another peculiarity. Balzac's genius for skilfully combined photographic detail explains his strange power of mystification. A word is wanting to express that faint acquiescence or mimic belief which we generally grant to a novelist. Dr. Newman has constructed a scale of assent according to its varying degrees of intensity; and we might, perhaps, assume that to each degree there corresponds a mock assent accorded to different kinds of fiction. If Scott, for example, requires from his readers a shadow of that kind of belief which we grant to an ordinary historian, Balzac requires a shadow of the belief which Dr. Pusey gives to the Bible. This still remains distinctly below any genuine assent; for Balzac never wishes us really to forget, though he occasionally forgets himself, that his most lifelike characters are imaginary. But in certain subordinate topics he seems to make a higher demand on our faith.

He is full of more or less fanciful heresies, and labours hard to convince us either that they are true or that he seriously holds them. This is what I mean by mystification, and one fears to draw a line as to which he was probably far from clear himself. Thus, for example, he is a devout believer in physiognomy, and not only in its obvious sense; he erects it into an occult science. Lavater and Gall, he says, "prove incontestably" that ominous signs exist in our heads. Take, for example, the chasseur Michu, his white face injected with blood and compressed like a Calmuck's; his ruddy, crisp hair; his beard cut in the shape of a fan; the noble forehead which surmounts and overhangs his sunburnt, sarcastic features; his ears well detached, and possessing a sort of mobility, like those of a wild animal; his mouth half open, and revealing a set of fine but uneven teeth; his thick and glossy whiskers; his hair, close in front, long on the sides and behind, with its wild, ruddy hue throwing into relief the strange and fatal character of the physiognomy; his short thick neck, designed to tempt the hatchet of the guillotine: these details, so accurately photographed, not only prove that M. Michu was a resolute, faithful servant, capable of the profoundest secrecy and the most disinterested attachment, but, for the really skilful reader of

mystic symbols, foretell his ultimate fate—namely, that he will be the victim of a false accusation. Balzac, however, ventures into still more whimsical extremes. He accepts, in all apparent seriousness, the theory of his favourite, Mr. Shandy, that a man's name influences his character. Thus, for example, a man called Minoret-Levrault must necessarily be "un éléphant sans trompe et sans intelligence," and the occult meaning of Z. Marcas requires a long and elaborate commentary. Repeat the word Marcas, dwelling on the first syllable and dropping abruptly on the second, and you will see that the man who bears it must be a martyr. The zigzag of the initial implies a life of torment. What ill wind, he asks, has blown upon this letter, which in no language (Balzac's acquaintance with German was probably limited) commands more than fifty words? The name is composed of seven letters, and seven is most characteristic of cabalistic numbers. If M. Gozlan's narrative be authentic, Balzac was right to value this name highly, for he had spent many hours in seeking for it by a systematic perambulation of the streets of Paris. He was rather vexed at the discovery that the Marcas of real life was a tailor. "He deserved a better fate!" said Balzac pathetically; "but it shall be my business to immortalise him."

Balzac returns to this subject so often and so emphatically that one half believes him to be the victim of his own mystification. Perhaps he was the one genuine disciple of Mr. Shandy and Slawkenbergius, and believed sincerely in the occult influence of names and noses. In more serious matters it is impossible to distinguish the point at which his feigned belief passes into real superstition; he stimulates conviction so elaborately, that his sober opinions shade off imperceptibly into his fanciful dreamings. For a time he was attracted by mesmerism, and in the story of Ursule Mirouet he labours elaborately to infect his readers with a belief in what he calls "magnetism, the favourite science of Jesus, and one of the powers transmitted to the apostles." He assumes his gravest airs in adducing the cases of Cardan, Swedenborg, and a certain Duke of Montmorency, as though he were a genuine historical inquirer. He almost adopts the tone of a pious missionary in describing how his atheist doctor was led by the revelations of a *clairvoyante* to study Pascal's *Pensées* and Bossuet's sublime *Histoire des Variations*, though what those works have to do with mesmerism is rather difficult to see. He relates the mysterious visions caused by the converted doctor after his death, not less minutely, though more artistically, than De Foe

described the terrible apparition of Mrs. Veal, and, it must be confessed, his story illustrates with almost equal force the doctrine, too often forgotten by spiritualists, that ghosts should not make themselves too common. When once they begin to mix in general society, they become intolerably prosaic.

The ostentatious belief which is paraded in this instance is turned to more artistic account in the wonderful story of the *Peau de Chagrin*. Balzac there tries as conscientiously as ever to surmount the natural revolt of our minds against the introduction of the supernatural into life. The *peau de chagrin* is the modern substitute for the old-fashioned parchment on which contracts were signed with the devil. M. Valentin, its possessor, is a Faust of the boulevards; but our prejudices are softened by the circumstance that the *peau de chagrin* has a false air of scientific authenticity. It is discovered by a gentleman who spends a spare half-hour before committing suicide in an old curiosity shop, which occupies a sort of middle standing-ground between a wizard's laboratory and the ordinary Wardour Street shop. There is no question of signing with one's blood, but simply of accepting a curious substance with the property —rather a startling one, it is true—that its area diminishes in proportion to the amount of wishes gratified, and vanishes with the death of the

possessor. The steady flesh-and-blood men of science treat it just as we feel certain that they would do. After smashing a hydraulic press in the attempt to compress it, and exhausting the power of chemical agents, they agree to make a joke of it. It is not so much more wonderful than some of those modern miracles, which leave us to hesitate between the two incredible alternatives that men of science are fallible, or that mankind in general, like Sir Walter Scott's grandmother, are "awfu' leears." Every effort is made to reduce the strain upon our credulity to that moderate degree of intensity which may fairly be required from the reader of a wild fiction. When the first characteristic wish of the proprietor—namely, that he may be indulged in a frantic orgie—has been gratified without any apparent intervention of the supernatural, we are left just in that proper equilibrium between scepticism and credulity which is the right mental attitude in presence of a marvellous story. Balzac, it is true, seems rather to flag in continuing his narrative. The symbolical meaning begins to part company with the facts. Stories of this kind require the congenial atmosphere of an ideal world, and the effort of interpreting such a poetical legend into terms of ordinary life is perhaps too great for the powers of any literary artist. At any rate M. Valentin

drops after a time from the level of Faust to become the hero of a rather commonplace Parisian story. The opening scenes, however, are an admirable specimen of the skill by which our irrepressible scepticism may be hindered from intruding into a sphere where it is out of place; or rather—for one can hardly speak of belief in such a connection—of the skill by which the discord between the surroundings of the nineteenth century and a story of grotesque supernaturalism can be converted into a pleasant harmony. A similar effect is produced in one of Balzac's finest stories, the *Recherche de l'Absolu*. Every accessory is provided to induce us, so long as we are under the spell, to regard the discovery of the philosopher's stone as a reasonable application of human energy. We are never quite clear whether Balthazar Claes is a madman or a commanding genius. We are kept trembling on the verge of a revelation till we become interested in spite of our more sober sense. A single diamond turns up in a crucible which was unluckily produced in the absence of the philosopher, so that he cannot tell what are the necessary conditions of repeating the process. He is supposed to discover the secret just as he is struck by a paralysis, which renders him incapable of revealing it, and dies whilst making desperate efforts to

communicate the crowning success to his family. Balzac throws himself into the situation with such energy that we are irresistibly carried away by his enthusiasm. The impossibility ceases to annoy us, and merely serves to give additional dignity to the story.

One other variety of mystification may introduce us to some of Balzac's most powerful stories. He indulges more frequently than could be wished in downright melodrama, or what is generally called sensational writing. In the very brilliant sketch of Nathan in *Une Fille d'Eve*, he remarks that "the mission of genius is to search, through the accidents of the true, for that which must appear probable to all the world." The common saying, that truth is stranger than fiction, should properly be expressed as an axiom that fiction ought not to be so strange as truth. A marvellous event is interesting in real life, simply because we know that it happened. In a fiction we know that it did not happen; and therefore it is interesting only as far as it is explained. Anybody can invent a giant or a genius by the simple process of altering figures or piling up superlatives. The artist has to make the existence of the giant or the genius conceivable. Balzac, however, often enough forgets this

principle, and treats us to purely preposterous incidents, which are either grotesque or simply childish. The history of the marvellous *Thirteen*, for example, that mysterious band which includes statesmen, beggars, men of fortune, and journalists, and goes about committing the most inconceivable crimes without the possibility of discovery, becomes simply ludicrous. Balzac, as usual, labours to reconcile our minds to the absurdity; but the effort is beyond his powers. The amazing disease which he invents for the benefit of the villains in the *Cousine Bette* can only be accepted as a broad joke. At times, as in the story of the *Grande Bretêche*, where the lover is bricked up by the husband in the presence of the wife, he reminds us of Edgar Poe's worst extravagances. There is, indeed, this much to be said for Balzac in comparison with the more recent school, who have turned to account all the most refined methods of breaking the ten commandments and the criminal code; the fault of the so-called sensation writer is, not that he deals in murder, bigamy, or adultery—every great writer likes to use powerful situations—but that he relies upon our interest in startling crimes to distract our attention from feebly-drawn characters and conventional details. Balzac does not often fall into that weakness. If his criminals are frequently of the most

outrageous kind, and indulge even in practices unmentionable, the crime is intended at least to be of secondary interest. He tries to fix our attention on the passions by which they are caused, and to attract us chiefly by the legitimate method of analysing human nature—even, it must be confessed, in some of its most abnormal manifestations. Macbeth is not interesting because he commits half-a-dozen murders; but the murders are interesting because they are committed by Macbeth. We may generally say as much for Balzac's villains; and it is the only justification for a free use of blood and brutality. In applying these remarks, we come to the real secret of Balzac's power, which will demand a fuller consideration.

It is common to say of all great novelists, and of Balzac in particular, that they display a wonderful "knowledge of the human heart." The chief objection to the phrase is that such knowledge does not exist. Nobody has as yet found his way through the complexities of that intricate machine, and described the springs and balances by which its movement is originated and controlled. Men of vivid imagination are in some respects less competent for such a work than their neighbours. They have not the cool, hard, and steady hand required for psychological dissection. Balzac

gave a queer specimen of his own incapacity in an attempt to investigate the true history of a real murder, celebrated in its day, and supposed by everybody but Balzac to have been committed by one Peytel, who was put to death in spite of his pleading. His skill in devising motives for imaginary atrocities was a positive disqualification for dealing with facts and legal evidence. The greatest poet or novelist describes only one person, and that is himself; and he differs from his inferiors, not necessarily in having a more systematic knowledge, but in having wider sympathies, and, so to speak, possessing a great number of characters. Cervantes was at once Don Quixote and Sancho Panza ; Shakespeare was Hamlet and Mercutio and Othello and Falstaff; Scott was at once Dandie Dinmont and the Antiquary and the Master of Ravenswood; and Balzac embodies his different phases of feeling in Eugénie Grandet and Vautrin and the Père Goriot. The assertion that he knew the human heart must be interpreted to mean that he could sympathise with, and give expression to, a wide range of human passions; as his supposed knowledge of the world implies merely that he was deeply impressed by certain phenomena of the social medium in which he was placed. Nobody, I should be inclined to think, would have given a more unsound judgment than

Balzac as to the characters of the men whom he met, or formed a less trustworthy estimate of the real condition of society. He was totally incapable of stripping the bare facts given by observation of the colouring which they received from his own idiosyncrasy. But nobody, within certain points, could express more vividly in outward symbols the effect produced upon keen sympathies and a powerful imagination by the aspect of the world around him.

The characteristic peculiarities of Balzac's novels may be described as the intensity with which he expresses certain motives, and the vigour with which he portrays the real or imaginary corruption of society. Upon one particular situation, or class of situations, favourable to this peculiar power, he is never tired of dwelling. He repeats himself indeed, in a certain sense, as a man must necessarily repeat himself who writes eighty-five stories, besides doing other work, in less than twenty years. In this voluminous outpouring of matter the machinery is varied with wonderful fertility of invention, but one sentiment recurs very frequently. The great majority of Balzac's novels, including all the most powerful examples, may thus be described as variations on a single theme. Each of them is in fact the record of a martyrdom. There is always a virtuous hero

or heroine who is tortured, and most frequently, tortured to death, by a combination of selfish intrigues. The commonest case is, of course, that which has become the staple plot of French novelists, where the interesting young woman is sacrificed to the brutality of a dull husband: that, for example, is the story of the *Femme de Trentre Ans*, of *Le Lys dans la Vallée*, and of several minor performances ; then we have the daughter sacrificed to the avaricious father, as in *Eugénie Grandet;* the woman sacrificed to the imperious lover in the *Duchesse de Langeais;* the immoral beauty sacrificed to the ambition of her lover in the *Splendeurs et Misères des Courtisanes;* the mother sacrificed to the dissolute son in the *Ménage de Garçon;* the woman of political ambition sacrificed to the contemptible intriguers opposed to her in *Les Employés;* and, indeed, in one way or other, as subordinate character or as heroine, this figure of a graceful feminine victim comes into nearly every novel. Virtuous heroes fare little better. Poor Colonel Chabert is disowned and driven to beggary by the wife who has committed bigamy; the luckless curé, Birotteau, is cheated out of his prospects and doomed to a broken heart by the successful villainy of a rival priest and his accomplices; the Comte de Manerville is ruined and transported by his wife and his

detestable mother-in-law; Père Goriot is left to starvation by his daughters; the Marquis d'Espard is all but condemned as a lunatic by the manœuvres of his wife; the faithful servant Michu comes to the guillotine; the devoted notary Chesnel is beggared in the effort to save his scapegrace of a master; Michaud, another devoted adherent, is murdered with perfect success by the brutal peasantry, and his wife dies of the news; Balthazar Claes is the victim of his devotion to science; and Z. Marcas dies unknown and in the depths of misery as a reward for trying to be a second Colbert. The old-fashioned canons of poetical justice are inverted; and the villains are dismissed to live very happily ever afterwards, whilst the virtuous are slain outright or sentenced to a death by slow torture. Thackeray, in one or two of his minor stories, has touched the same note. The history of Mr. Deuceace, and especially its catastrophe, is much in Balzac's style; but, as a rule, our English novelists shrink from anything so unpleasant.

Perhaps the most striking example of this method is the *Père Goriot.* The general situation may be described in two words, by saying that Goriot is the modern King Lear. Mesdames de Restaud and de Nucingen are the representatives of Regan and Goneril; but the Parisian Lear is

not allowed the consolation of a Cordelia; the cup of misery is measured out to him drop by drop, and the bitterness of each dose is analysed with chemical accuracy. We watch the poor old broken-down merchant, who has impoverished himself to provide his daughters' dowries, and has gradually stripped himself, first of comfort, and then of the necessaries of life to satisfy the demands of their folly and luxury, as we might watch a man clinging to the edge of a cliff and gradually dropping lower and lower, catching feebly at every point of support till his strength is exhausted, and the inevitable catastrophe follows. The daughters, allowed to retain some fragments of good feeling and not quite irredeemably hateful, are gradually yielding to the demoralising influence of a heartless vanity. They yield it is true, pretty completely at last; but their wickedness seems to reveal the influence of a vague but omnipotent power of evil in the background. There is not a more characteristic scene in Balzac than that in which Rastignac, the lover of Madame de Nucingen, overhears the conversation between the father in his wretched garret and the modern Goneril and Regan. A gleam of good fortune has just encouraged old Goriot to anticipate an escape from his troubles. On the morning of the day of expected release Madame Goneril de Nucingen

rushes up to her father's garret to explain to him that her husband, the rich banker, having engaged all his funds in some diabolical financial intrigue, refuses to allow her the use of her fortune; whilst, owing to her own misconduct, she is afraid to appeal to the law. They have a hideous tacit compact, according to which the wife enjoys full domestic liberty, whilst the husband may use her fortune to carry out his dishonest plots. She begs her father to examine the facts in the light of his financial experience, though the examination must be deferred, that she may not look ill with the the excitement when she meets her lover at the ball. As the poor father is tormenting his brains, Madame Regan de Restaud appears in terrible distress. Her lover has threatened to commit suicide unless he can meet a certain bill, and to save him she has pledged certain diamonds which were heirlooms in her husband's family. Her husband has discovered the whole transaction, and though not making an open scandal, imposes some severe conditions upon her future. Old Goriot is raving against the brutality of her husband, when Regan adds that there is still a sum to be paid, without which her lover, to whom she has sacrificed everything, will be ruined. Now old Goriot had employed just this sum—all but the very last fragment of his fortune—in the service of

Goneril. A desperate quarrel instantly takes place between the two fine ladies over this last scrap of their father's property. They are fast degenerating into Parisian Billingsgate, when Goriot succeeds in obtaining silence and proposes to strip himself of his last penny. Even the sisters hesitate at such an impiety, and Rastignac enters with some apology for listening, and hands over to the countess a certain bill of exchange for a sum which he professes himself to owe to Goriot, and which will just save her lover. She accepts the paper, but vehemently denounces her sister for having, as she supposes, allowed Rastignac to listen to their hideous revelations, and retires in a fury, whilst the father faints away. He recovers to express his forgiveness, and at this moment the countess returns, ostensibly to throw herself on her knees and beg her father's pardon. She apologises to her sister, and a general reconciliation takes place. But before she has again left the room she has obtained her father's endorsement to Rastignac's bill. Even her most genuine fury had left coolness enough for calculation, and her burst of apparent tenderness was a skilful bit of comedy for squeezing one more drop of blood from her father and victim. That is a genuine stroke of Balzac.

Hideous as the performance appears when coolly

stated, it must be admitted that the ladies have got into such terrible perplexities from tampering with the seventh commandment, that there is some excuse for their breaking the fifth. Whether such an accumulation of horrors is a legitimate process in art, and whether a healthy imagination would like to dwell upon such loathsome social sores, is another question. The comparison suggested with *King Lear* may illustrate the point. In Balzac all the subordinate details which Shakespeare throws in with a very slovenly touch are elaborately drawn, and contribute powerfully to the total impression. On the other hand, we never reach the lofty poetical heights of the grandest scenes in *King Lear*. But the situation of the two heroes offers an instructive contrast. Lear is weak, but is never contemptible; he is the ruin of a gallant old king, is guilty of no degrading compliance, and dies like a man, with his "good biting falchion" still grasped in his feeble hand. To change him into Goriot we must suppose that he had licked the hand which struck him, that he had helped on the adulterous intrigues of Goneril and Regan from sheer weakness, and that all his fury had been directed against Cornwall and Albany for objecting to his daughter's eccentric views of the obligation of the marriage vow. Paternal affection

leading a man to the most trying self-sacrifice is a worthy motive for a great drama or romance; but Balzac is so anxious to intensify the emotion, that he makes even paternal affection morally degrading. Everything must be done to heighten the colouring. Our sympathies are to be excited by making the sacrifice as complete, and the emotion which prompts it as overpowering, as possible; until at last the love of children becomes a monomania. Goriot is not only dragged through the mud of Paris, but he grovels in it with a will. In short, Balzac wants that highest power which shows itself by moderation, and commits a fault like that of an orator who emphasises every sentence. With less expenditure of horrors, he would excite our compassion more powerfully. But after all, Goriot is, perhaps, more really affecting even than King Lear.

Situations of the *Père Goriot* kind are, in some sense, more appropriate for heroines than for heroes. Self-sacrifice is, for the present at least, considered by a large part of mankind as the complete duty of woman. The feminine martyr can indulge without loss of our esteem in compliances which would be degrading in a man. Accordingly Balzac finds the amplest materials for his favourite situation in the torture of innocent women. The great example of his skill in this department is

Eugénie Grandet, in which the situation of the Père Goriot is inverted. Poor Eugénie is the victim of a domestic tyrant, who is, perhaps, Balzac's most finished portrait of the cold-blooded and cunning miser. The sacrifice of a woman's life to paternal despotism is unfortunately even commoner in real life than in fiction; and when the lover, from whom the old miser has divided her during his life, deserts her after his death, we feel that the mournful catastrophe is demanded by the sombre prologue. The book may indeed justify, to some extent, one of the ordinary criticisms upon Balzac, that he showed a special subtlety in describing the sufferings of women. The question as to the general propriety of that criticism is rather difficult for a male critic. I confess to a certain scepticism, founded partly on the general principle that hardly any author can really describe the opposite sex, and partly on an antipathy which I cannot repress to Balzac's most ambitious feminine portraits.

Eugénie Grandet is perhaps the purest of his women; but then Eugénie Grandet is simply stupid, and interesting from her sufferings rather than her character. She reminds us of some patient animal of the agricultural kind, with bovine softness of eyes and bovine obstinacy under suffering. His other women, though they are not

simply courtesans, after the fashion of some French writers, seem, as it were, to have a certain perceptible taint; they breathe an unwholesome atmosphere. In one of his extravagant humours, he tells us that the most perfect picture of purity, in existence is the Madonna of the Genoese painter, Piola, but that even that celestial Madonna would have looked like a Messalina by the side of the Duchesse de Manfrigneuse. If the duchess resembled either personage in character, it was certainly not the Madonna. And Balzac's best women give us the impression that they are courtesans acting the character of virgins, and showing admirable dramatic skill in the performance. They may keep up the part so obstinately as to let the acting become earnest; but even when they don't think of breaking the seventh commandment, they are always thinking about not breaking it. When he has done his best to describe a thoroughly pure woman, such as Henriette in the *Lys dans la Vallee*, he cannot refrain from spoiling his performance by throwing in a hint at the conclusion that, after all, she had a strong disposition to go wrong, which was only defeated by circumstances. Indeed, the ladies who in his pages have broken loose from all social restraints, differ only in external circumstances from their more correct sisters. Coralie, in the

*Illusions Perdues*, is not so chaste in her conduct as the immaculate Henriette, but is not a whit less delicate in her tastes. Madame de la Baudraye deserts her husband, and lives for some years with her disreputable lover at Paris, and does not in the least forfeit the sympathies of her creator. Balzac's feminine types may be classified pretty easily. At bottom they are all of the sultana variety—play-things who occasionally venture into mixing with the serious affairs of life, but then only on pain of being ridiculous (as in the *Employés*, or the *Muse du Département*); but properly confined to their drawing-rooms, with delicate cajoleries for their policy, and cunning instead of intellect. Sometimes they are cold-hearted and selfish, and then they are vicious, making victims of lovers, husbands, or fathers, consuming fortunes, and spreading ill-will by cunning intrigues; sometimes they are virtuous, and therefore, according to Balzac's logic, pitiable victims of the world. But their virtue, when it exists, is the effect, not of lofty principle, but of a certain delicacy of taste corresponding to a fine organisation. They object to vice, because it is apt to be coarse; and are perfectly ready to yield, if it can be presented in such graceful forms as not to shock their sensibilities. Marriage is therefore a complicated intrigue in which one party is always deceived, though it may

be for his or her good. If you will be loved, says the judicious lady in the *Mémoires de Deux Jeunes Mariées*, the secret is not to love; and the rather flimsy epigram is converted into a great moral truth. The justification of the lady is, that love is only made permanent by elaborate intrigue. The wife is to be always on the footing of a mistress who can only preserve her lover by incessant and infinitely varied caresses. To do this, she must be herself cool. The great enemy of matrimonial happiness is satiety, and we are constantly presented with an affectionate wife boring her husband to death, and alienating him by over-devotion. If one party is to be cheated, the one who is freest from passion will be the winner of the game. As a maxim, after the fashion of Rochefoucauld, this doctrine may have enough truth to be plausible; but when seriously accepted and made the substantive moral of a succession of stories, one is reminded less of a really acute observer than of a lad fresh from college who thinks that wisdom consists in an exaggerated cynicism. When ladies of this variety break their hearts, they either die or retire in a picturesque manner to a convent. They are indeed the raw material of which the genuine *dévote* is made. The morbid sentimentality directed to the lover passes without perceptible shock into a religious

sentimentality, the object of which is at least ostensibly different. The graceful but voluptuous mistress of the Parisian salon is developed without any violent transition into the equally graceful and ascetic nun. The connection between the luxurious indulgence of material flirtations and religious mysticism is curious, but unmistakable.

Balzac's reputation in this respect is founded, not on his little hoard of cynical maxims, which, to say the truth, are not usually very original, but on the vivid power of describing the details and scenery of the martyrdom, and the energy with which he paints the emotion, of the victim. Whether his women are very lifelike, or very varied in character, may be doubted; but he has certainly endowed them with an admirable capacity for suffering, and forces us to listen sympathetically to their cries of anguish. The peculiar cynicism implied in this view of feminine existence must be taken as part of his fundamental theory of society. When Rastignac has seen Goriot buried, the ceremony being attended only by his daughters' empty carriages, he climbs to the highest part of the cemetery, and looks over Paris. As he contemplates the vast buzzing hive, he exclaims solemnly, "à nous deux maintenant!" The world is before him; he is to fight his way in future without remorse. Accordingly, Balzac's

view of society is, that it is a masquerade of devils, engaged in tormenting a few wandering angels. That society is not what Balzac represents it to be is sufficiently proved by the fact that society exists; as indeed he is profoundly convinced that its destruction is only a question of time. It is rotten to the core. Lust and avarice are the moving forms of the world, while profound and calculating selfishness has sapped the base of all morality. The type of a successful statesman is De Marsay, a kind of imaginary Talleyrand, who rules because he has recognised the intrinsic baseness of mankind, and has no scruples in turning it to account. Vautrin, who is an open enemy of society, is simply De Marsay in revolt. The weapons with which he fights are distinguished from those of greater men, not in their intrinsic wickedness, but in their being accidentally forbidden by law. He is less of a hypocrite, and scarcely a greater villain than his more prosperous rivals. He ultimately recognises the futility of the strife, agrees to wear a mask like his neighbours, and accepts the congenial duties of a police agent. The secret of success in all ranks of life is to be without scruples of morality, but exceedingly careful of breaking the law. The bankers, Nucingen and Du Tillet, are merely cheats on a gigantic scale. They ruin their enemies by finan-

ciering instead of picking pockets. Be wicked if you would be successful; if possible let your wickedness be refined; but, at all events, be wicked.

There is, indeed, a class of unsuccessful villains, to be found chiefly amongst journalists, for whom Balzac has a special aversion; they live, he tells us, partly on extortion, and partly on the prostitution of their talents to gratify political or personal animosities, and are at the mercy of the longest purse. They fail in life, not because they are too immoral, but because they are too weak. They are the victims instead of the accomplices of more resolute evil-doers. Lucien de Rubempré is the type of this class. Endowed with surpassing genius and personal beauty, he goes to Paris to make his fortune, and is introduced to the world as it is. On the one hand is a little knot of virtuous men, called the *cénacle*, who are working for posterity and meanwhile starving. On the other is a vast mass of cheats and dupes. After a brief struggle Lucien yields to temptation, and joins in the struggle for wealth and power. But he has not strength enough to play his part. His head is turned by the flattery of pretty actresses and scheming publishers: he is enticed into thoughtless dissipation, and, after a brilliant start, finds that he is at the mercy of the cleverer villains

who surround him; that he has been bought and sold like a sheep; that his character is gone, and his imagination become sluggish; and, finally, he has to escape from utter ruin by scarcely describable degradation. He writes a libel on one of his virtuous friends, who is forgiving enough to improve it and correct it for the press. In order to bury his mistress, who has been ruined with him, he has to raise money by grovelling in the foulest depths of literary sewerage. He at last succeeds in crawling back to his relations in the country, morally and materially ruined. He makes another effort to rise, backed up by the diabolical arts of Vautrin, and relying rather on his beauty than his talents. The world is again too strong for him, and, after being accomplice in the most outrageous crimes, he ends appropriately by hanging himself in prison. Vautrin, as we have seen, escapes from the fate of his partner because he retains coolness enough to practise upon the vices of the governing classes. The world, in short, is composed of three classes—consistent and, therefore, successful villains; inconsistent and, therefore, unsuccessful villains; and virtuous persons who never have a chance of success, and enjoy the honours of starvation.

The provinces differ from Paris in the nature of the social warfare, but not in its morality. Pas-

sions are directed to meaner objects, they are narrower, and more intense. The whole of a man's faculties are concentrated upon one object; and he pursues it for years with relentless and undeviating ardour. To supplant a rival, to acquire a few more acres, to gratify jealousy of a superior, he will labour for a lifetime. The intensity of his hatred supplies his want of intellect; he is more cunning, if less far-sighted; and in the contest between the brilliant Parisian and the plodding provincial we generally have an illustration of the hare and the tortoise. The blind, persistent hatred gets the better in the long run of the most brilliant, but more transitory, passion. The lower nature here, too, gets the better of the higher; and Balzac characteristically delights in the tragedy produced by genius which falls before cunning, as virtue almost invariably yields to vice. It is only when the slow provincial obstinacy happens to be on the side of virtue that stupidity, doubled with virtue, as embodied for example in two or three French Caleb Balderstons, generally gets the worst of it. There are exceptions to this general rule. Even Balzac sometimes relents. A reprieve is granted at the last moment, and the martyr is unbound from the stake. But those catastrophes are not only exceptional, but rather annoying. We have been

so prepared to look for a sacrifice that we are disappointed instead of relieved. If Balzac's readers could be consulted during the last few pages of a novel, I feel sure that most thumbs would be turned upwards, and the lions allowed to have their will of the Christians. Perhaps our appetites have been depraved; but we are not in the cue for a happy conclusion.

I know not whether it was the cause or the consequence of this sentiment that Balzac was a thorough legitimist. He does not believe in the vitality of the old order, any more than he believes in the truth of Catholicism. But he regrets the extinction of the ancient faiths, which he admits to be unsuitable; and sees in their representatives the only picturesque and really estimable elements that still survived in French society. He heartily despises the modern mediævalists, who try to spread a thin varnish over a decaying order; the world is too far gone in wickedness for such a futile remedy. The old chivalrous sentiments of the genuine noblesse are giving way to the base chicanery of the bourgeois who supplant them: the peasantry are mean, avaricious, and full of bitter jealousy; but they are triumphantly rooting out the last vestiges of feudalism. Democracy and communism are the fine names put forward to justify the enmity of those who have

not, against those who have. Their success means merely an approaching "descent of Niagara," and the growth of a more debasing and more materialistic form of despotism. But it would be a mistake to assume that this view of the world implies that Balzac is in a state of lofty moral indignation. Nothing can be further from the case. The world is wicked; but it is fascinating. Society is very corrupt, it is true; but intensely and permanently amusing. Paris is a hell; but hell is the only place worth living in. The play of evil passions gives infinite subjects for dramatic interests. The financial warfare is more diabolical than the old literal warfare, but quite as entertaining. There is really as much romance connected with bills of exchange as with swords and lances, and rigging the market is nothing but the modern form of lying in ambush. Goneril and Regan are triumphant; but we may admire the grace of their manners and the dexterity with which they cloak their vices. Iago not only poisons Othello's peace of mind, but, in the world of Balzac, he succeeds to Othello's place, and is universally respected. The story receives an additional flavour. In a characteristic passage, Balzac regrets that Molière did not continue *Tartufe*. It would then have appeared how bitterly Orgon regretted the loss of the hypocrite,

who, it is said, made love to his wife, but who, at any rate, had an interest in making things pleasant. Your conventional catastrophe is a mistake in art, as it is a misrepresentation of facts. Tartufe has a good time of it in Balzac: instead of meeting with an appropriate punishment, he flourishes and thrives, and we look on with a smile not altogether devoid of complacency. Shall we not take the world as it is, and be amused at the *Comédie Humaine*, rather than fruitlessly rage against it? It will be played out whether we like it or not, and we may as well adapt our tastes to our circumstances.

Ought we to be shocked at this extravagant cynicism; to quote it, as respectable English journalists used to do, as a proof of the awful corruption of French society, or to regard it as semi-humorous exaggeration? I can't quite sympathise with people who take Balzac seriously. I cannot talk about the remorseless skill with which he tears off the mask from the fearful corruptions of modern society, and penetrates into the most hidden motives of the human heart; nor can I infer from his terrible pictures of feminine suffering that for every one of those pictures a woman's heart had been tortured to death. This, or something like this, I have read; and I can only say that I don't believe a word of it. Balzac, indeed,

as compared with our respectable romancers, has the merit of admitting passions whose existence we scrupulously ignore; and the further merit that he takes a far wider range of sentiment, and does not hold by the theory that the life of a man or a woman closes at the conventional end of a third volume. But he is above all things a dreamer, and his dreams resemble nightmares. Powerfully as his actors are put upon the stage, they seem to me to be, after all, "such stuff as dreams are made of." A genuine observer of life does not find it so highly spiced, and draws more moderate conclusions. Balzac's characters run into typical examples of particular passions rather than genuine human beings; they are generally monomaniacs. Balthazar Claes, who gives up his life to search for the philosopher's stone, is closely related to them all; only we must substitute for the philosopher's stone some pet passion, in which the whole nature is absorbed. They have the unnatural strain of mind which marks the approach to madness. It is not ordinary daylight which illuminates Balzac's dreamland, but some fantastic combination of Parisian lamps, which tinges all the actors with an unearthly glare, and distorts their features into extravagant forms. The result has, as I have said, a strange fascination; but one is half-ashamed of yielding because

one feels that it is due to the use of rather unholy drugs. The vapours that rise from his magic caldron and shape themselves into human forms smell unpleasantly of sulphur, or perhaps of Parisian sewers.

The highest poetry, like the noblest morality, is the product of a thoroughly healthy mind. A diseased tendency in one respect is certain to make itself manifest in the other. Now Balzac, though he shows some powers which are unsurpassed or unequalled, possessed a mind which, to put it gently, was not exactly well regulated. He took a pleasure in dwelling upon horrors from which a healthy imagination shrinks, and rejoiced greatly in gloating over the mysteries of iniquity. I do not say that this makes his work immoral in the ordinary sense. Probably few people who are likely to read Balzac would be any the worse for the study. But, from a purely artistic point of view, he is injured by his morbid tendencies. The highest triumph of style is to say what everybody has been thinking in such a way as to make it new; the greatest triumph of art is to make us see the poetical side of the commonplace life around us. Balzac's ambition was, doubtless, aimed in that direction. He wished to show that life in Paris or at Tours was as interesting to the man of real insight as any more ideal region. In a certain sense,

he has accomplished his purpose. He has discovered food for a dark and powerful imagination in the most commonplace details of daily life. But he falls short in so far as he is unable to represent things as they are, and has a taste for impossible horrors. There are tragedies enough all round us for him who has eyes to see. Balzac is not content with the materials at hand, or rather he has a love for the more exceptional and hideous manifestations. Therefore the *Comédie Humaine*, instead of being an accurate picture of human life, and appealing to the sympathies of all human beings, is a collection of monstrosities, whose vices are unnatural, and whose virtues are rather like their vices. One feels that there is something narrow and artificial about his work. It is intensely powerful, but it is not the highest kind of power. He makes the utmost of the gossip of a club smoking-room, or the scandal of a drawing-room, or perhaps of a country public-house; but he represents a special phase of manners, and that not a particularly pleasant one, rather than the more fundamental and permanent sentiments of mankind. When shall we see a writer who can be powerful without being spasmodic, and pierce through the surface of society without seeking for interest in its foulest abysses?

# De Quincey

Little more than fourteen years ago there passed from among us a man who held a high and very peculiar position in English literature. In 1821 De Quincey first published the work with which his name is most commonly associated, and at uncertain intervals he gave tokens to mankind of his continued presence on earth. What his life may have been in the intervals seems to have been at times unknown even to his friends. He began by disappearing from school and from his family, and seems to have fallen into the habit of temporary eclipses. At one moment he dropped upon his acquaintance from the clouds; at another he would vanish into utter darkness for weeks or months together. One day he came to dine with Christopher North,—so we are told in the professor's life,—was detained for the night by a heavy storm of rain, and prolonged his impromptu visit for a year. During that period his habits must have been rather amazing to a well-regulated household. His wants, indeed, were simple, and,

in one sense, regular; a particular joint of mutton, cut according to a certain mathematical formula, and an ounce of laudanum, made him happy for a day. But in the hours when ordinary beings are awake he was generally to be found stretched in profound opium-slumbers upon a rug before the fire, and it was only about two or three in the morning that he gave unequivocal symptoms of vitality, and suddenly gushed forth in streams of wondrous eloquence to the supper parties detained for the purpose of witnessing the display. Between these irregular apparitions we are lastly given to understand that his life was so strange that its details would be incredible. What these incredible details may have been, I have no means of knowing. It is enough that he was a strange unsubstantial being, flitting uncertainly about in the twilight regions of society, emerging by fits and starts into visibility, afflicted with a general vagueness as to the ordinary duties of mankind, and generally taking much more opium than was good for him. He tells us, indeed, that he broke off his over-mastering habit by vigorous efforts; as he also tells us that opium is a cure for most grievous evils, and especially saved him from an early death by consumption. It is plain enough, however, that he never really refrained for any length of time; and perhaps we should congratulate

ourselves on a propensity, unfortunate, it may be, for its victim, but leading to the *Confessions* as one collateral result.

The life of De Quincey by "H. A. Page," published since this was written, has removed much of the mystery; and it has also done much to raise in some respects our estimate of his character. With all his weaknesses De Quincey undoubtedly was a man who could excite love as well as pity. Incapable, to a grotesque degree, of anything like business, he did his best to discharge domestic duties; he had a punctilious sense of honour, and got himself into difficulties by a generosity which was certainly not corrected by the virtue of prudence. But I will not attempt to sum up the facts, for which, as for a higher estimate than I can subscribe of his intellectual position, I gladly refer to his biography. I have only to do with the De Quincey of books which have a singular fascination. De Quincey himself gives thanks for four circumstances. He rejoices that his lot was cast in a rustic solitude; that that solitude was in England; that his "infant feelings were moulded by the gentlest of sisters," instead of "horrid pugilistic brothers;" and that he and his were members of "a pure, holy, and" (the last epithet should be emphasised) "magnificent Church." The thanksgiving is characteristic, for it indicates his naïve

conviction that his admiration was due to the intrinsic merits of the place and circumstances of his birth, and not to the accident that they were his own. It would be useless to inquire whether a more bracing atmosphere and a less retired spot might have been more favourable to his talents; but we may trace the influence of these conditions of his early life upon his subsequent career.

De Quincey implicitly puts forward a claim which has been accepted by all competent critics. They declare, and he tacitly assumes, that he is a master of the English language. He claims a sort of infallibility in deciding upon the precise use of words and the merits of various styles. But he explicitly claims something more. He declares that he has used language for purposes to which it has hardly been applied by any prose writer. The *Confessions of an Opium-eater* and the *Suspiria de Profundis* are, he tells us, "modes of impassioned prose, ranging under no precedents that I am aware of in any literature." The only confessions that have previously made any great impression upon the world are those of St. Augustine and of Rousseau; but, with one short exception in St. Augustine, neither of those compositions contains any passion, and, therefore, De Quincey stands absolutely alone as the inventor and sole

performer on a new musical instrument—for such an instrument is the English language in his hands. He belongs to a genus in which he is the only individual. The novelty and the difficulty of the task must be his apology if he fails, and causes of additional glory if he succeeds. He alone of all human beings who have written since the world began, has entered a path, which the absence of rivals proves to be encumbered with some unusual obstacles. The accuracy and value of so bold a claim require a short examination. After all, every writer, however obscure, may contrive by a judicious definition to put himself into a solitary class. He has some peculiarities which distinguish him from all other mortals. He is the only journalist who writes at a given epoch from a particular garret in Grub Street, or the only poet who is exactly six feet high and measures precisely forty-two inches round the chest. Any difference whatever may be applied to purposes of classification, and the question is whether the difference is, or is not, of much importance. By examining, therefore, the propriety of De Quincey's view of his own place in literature, we shall be naturally led to some valuation of his distinctive merits. In deciding whether a bat should be classed with birds or beasts, we have to determine the nature of the beast and the true

theory of his wings. And De Quincey, if the comparison be not too quaint, is like the bat, an ambiguous character, rising on the wings of prose to the borders of the true poetical region.

De Quincey, then, announces himself as an impassioned writer, as a writer in impassioned prose, and, finally, as applying impassioned prose to confessions. The first question suggested by this assertion concerns the sense of the word "impassioned." There is very little of what one ordinarily means by passion in the *Confessions* or elsewhere. There are no explosions of political wrath, such as animate the *Letters on a Regicide Peace*, or of a deep religious emotion, which breathes through many of our greatest prose-writers. The language is undoubtedly a vehicle for sentiments of a certain kind, but hardly of that burning and impetuous order which we generally indicate by impassioned. It is deep, melancholy reverie, not concentrated essence of emotion; and the epithet fails to indicate any specific difference between himself and many other writers. The real peculiarity is not in the passion expressed, but in the mode of expressing it. De Quincey resembles the story-tellers mentioned by some Eastern travellers. So extraordinary is their power of face, and so skilfully modulated are the inflections of their voices, that even a European,

ignorant of the language, can follow the narrative with absorbing interest. One may fancy that if De Quincey's language were emptied of all meaning whatever, the mere sound of the words would move us, as the lovely word Mesopotamia moved Whitefield's hearer. The sentences are so delicately balanced, and so skilfully constructed, that his finer passages fix themselves in the memory without the aid of metre. Humbler writers are content if they can get through a single phrase without producing a decided jar. They aim at keeping up a steady jog-trot, which shall not give actual pain to the jaws of the reader. They no more think of weaving whole paragraphs or chapters into complex harmonies, than an ordinary pedestrian of "going to church in a galliard and coming home in a coranto." Even our great writers generally settle down to a stately but monotonous gait, after the fashion of Johnson or Gibbon, or are content with adopting a style as transparent and inconspicuous as possible. Language, according to the common phrase, is the dress of thought; and that dress is the best, according to modern canons of taste, which attracts least attention from its wearer. De Quincey scorns this sneaking maxim of prudence, and boldly challenges our admiration by indulgence in what he often calls "bravura." His language deserves a

commendation sometimes bestowed by ladies upon rich garments, that it is capable of standing up by itself. The form is so admirable that, for purposes of criticism, we must consider it as something apart from the substance. The most exquisite passages in De Quincey's writing are all more or less attempts to carry out the idea expressed in the title of the dream fugue. They are intended to be musical compositions, in which words have to play the part of notes. They are impassioned, not in the sense of expressing any definite sentiment, but because, from the structure and combination of the sentences, they harmonise with certain phases of emotion.

Briefly, De Quincey is doing in prose what every great poet does in verse. The specific mark thus indicated is still insufficient to give him a solitary position among writers. All great rhetoricians, as De Quincey defines and explains the term, rise to the borders of poetry, and the art which has recently been cultivated among us under the name of word-painting may be more fitly described as an attempt to produce poetical effects without the aid of metre. From most of the writers described under this rather unpleasant phrase he differs by the circumstance, that his art is more nearly allied to music than to painting. Or, if compared to any painters, it must be to

those who care comparatively little for distinct portraiture or dramatic interest. He resembles rather the school which is satisfied by contemplating gorgeous draperies, and graceful limbs and long processions of imposing figures, without caring to interpret the meaning of their works, or to seek for more than the harmonious arrangement of form and colour. In other words, his prose-poems should be compared to the paintings which aim at an effect analogous to that of stately pieces of music. Milton is the poet whom he seems to regard with the sincerest admiration; and he apparently wishes to emulate the majestic rhythm of the "God-gifted organ-voice of England." Or we may, perhaps, admit some analogy between his prose and the poetry of Keats, though it is remarkable that he speaks with very scant appreciation of his contemporary. The *Ode to a Nightingale*, with its marvellous beauty of versification and the dim associations half-consciously suggested by its language, surpasses, though it resembles, some of De Quincey's finest passages; and the *Hyperion* might have been translated into prose as a fitting companion for some of the opium dreams. It is in the success with which he produces such effects as these that De Quincey may fairly claim to be unsurpassed in our language. Pompous (if that word may be used in a good sense)

declamation in prose, where the beauty of the thought is lost in the splendour of the style, is certainly a rare literary product. Of the great rhetoricians whom De Quincey quotes in the Essay on *Rhetoric* just noticed, such men as Burke and Jeremy Taylor lead us to forget the means in the end. They sound the trumpet as a warning, not for the mere delight in its volume of sound. Perhaps his affinity to Sir Thomas Browne is more obvious; and one can understand the admiration which he bestows upon the opening bar of a passage in the *Urn-Burial:*

> Now since these bones have rested quietly in the grave under the drums and tramplings of three conquests [etc.]. What a melodious ascent [he exclaims], as of a prelude to some impassioned requiem breathing from the pomps of earth and from the sanctities of the grave! What a *fluctus decumanus* of rhetoric! Time expounded, not by generations or centuries, but by vast periods of conquests and dynasties; by cycles of Pharaohs and Ptolemies, Antiochi and Arsacides! And these vast successions of time distinguished and figured by the uproars which revolve at their inaugurations; by the drums and tramplings rolling overhead upon the chambers of forgotten dead—the trepidations of time and mortality vexing, at secular intervals, the everlasting sabbaths of the grave!

The commentator is seeking to eclipse the text, and his words are at once a description and an

example of his own most characteristic rhetoric. Wordsworth once uttered an aphorism which De Quincey repeats with great admiration: that language is not, as I have just said, the dress, but "the incarnation of thought." But though accepting and enforcing the doctrine by showing that the "mixture is too subtle, the intertexture too ineffable" to admit of expression, he condemns the style which is the best illustration of its truth. He is very angry with the admirers of Swift; De Foe and "many hundreds" of others wrote something quite as good; it only wanted "plain good sense, natural feeling, unpretendingness, some little scholarly practice in putting together the clockwork of sentences, and, above all, the advantage of an appropriate subject." Could Swift, he asks, have written a pendant to passages in Sir W. Raleigh, or Sir Thomas Browne, or Jeremy Taylor? He would have cut the same figure as "a forlorn scullion from a greasy eating-house at Rotterdam, if suddenly called away in vision to act as seneschal to the festival of Belshazzar the King, before a thousand of his lords." And what, we may retort, would Taylor, or Browne, or De Quincey himself, have done, had one of them been wanted to write down the project of Wood's half-pence in Ireland? He would have resembled a king in his coronation robes compelled to lead a

forlorn hope up the scaling ladders. The fact is, that Swift required for his style not only the plain good sense and other rare qualities enumerated, but pungent humour, quick insight, deep passion, and general power of mind, such as is given to few men in a century. But, as in his case the thought is really incarnated in the language we cannot criticise the style separately from the thoughts, or we can only assign, as its highest merit, its admirable fitness for producing the desired effect. It would be wrong to invert De Quincey's censure, and blame him because his gorgeous robes are not fitted for more practical purposes. To everything there is a time; for plain English, and for De Quincey's highly-wrought passages.

It would be difficult or impossible, and certainly it would be superfluous, to define with any precision the peculiar flavour of De Quincey's style. A few specimens would do more than any description; and De Quincey is too well known to justify quotation. It may be enough to notice that most of his brilliant performances are variations on the same theme. He appeals to our terror of the infinite, to the shrinking of the human mind before astronomical distances and geological periods of time. He paints vast perspectives, opening in long succession, till we grow dizzy in the contemplation. The cadence of his style

suggests sounds echoing each other, and growing gradually fainter, till they die away into infinite distance. Two great characteristics, he tells us, of his opium dreams were a deep-seated melancholy and an exaggeration of the things of space and time. Nightly he descended "into chasms and sunless abysses, depths below depths, from which it seemed hopeless that he could ever re-ascend." He saw buildings and landscapes "in proportion so vast as the human eye is not fitted to receive." He seemed to live ninety or a hundred years in a night, and even to pass through periods far beyond the limits of human existence. Melancholy and an awe-stricken sense of the vast and vague are the emotions which he communicates with the greatest power; though the melancholy is too dreamy to deserve the name of passion, and the terror of the infinite is not explicitly connected with any religious emotion. It is a proof of the fineness of his taste, that he scarcely ever falls into bombast; we tremble at his audacity in accumulating gorgeous phrases; but we confess that he is justified by the result. The only exception that I can remember is the passage in *The English Mailcoach*, where his exaggerated patriotism leads him into what strikes me at least as a rather vulgar bit of claptrap. If any reader will take the trouble to compare De Quincey's account of a kind of

anticipation of the Balaclava charge at the battle of Talavera, with Napier's description of the same facts, he will be amused at the distortion of history; but whatever the accuracy of the statements, one is a little shocked at finding "the inspiration of God" attributed to the gallant dragoons who were cut to pieces on that occasion, as other gallant men have been before and since. The phrase is overcharged, and inevitably suggests a cynical reaction of mind. The ideas of dragoons and inspiration do not coalesce so easily as might be wished; but, with this exception, I think that his purple patches are almost irreproachable, and may be read and re-read with increasing delight. I know of no other modern writer who has soared into the same regions with so uniform and easy a flight.

The question is often raised how far the attempt to produce by one art effects specially characteristic of another can be considered as legitimate; whether, for example, a sculptor, when encroaching upon the province of the painter, or a prose writer attempting to rival poets, may not be summarily condemned The answer probably would be that a critic who lays down such rules is erecting himself into a legislator, when he should be a simple observer. Success justifies itself; and when De Quincey obtains, without the aid of

metre, graces which few other writers have won by the same means, it is all the more creditable to De Quincey. A certain presumption, however, remains in such cases, that the failure to adopt the ordinary methods implies a certain deficiency of power. If we ask why De Quincey, who trenched so boldly upon the peculiar province of the poet, yet failed to use the poetical form, there is one very obvious answer. He has one intolerable fault, a fault which has probably done more than any other to diminish his popularity, and which is, of all faults, most diametrically opposed to poetical excellence. He is utterly incapable of concentration. He is, from the very principles on which his style is constructed, the most diffuse of writers. Other men will pack half-a-dozen distinct propositions into a sentence, and care little if they are somewhat crushed and distorted in the process. De Quincey insists upon putting each of them separately, smoothing them out elaborately, till not a wrinkle disturbs their uniform surface, and then presenting each of them for our acceptance with a placid smile. His commendable desire for lucidity of expression makes him nervously anxious to avoid any complexity of thought. Each step of his argument, each shade of meaning, and each fact in his narrative, must have its own separate embodiment; and every joint and con-

necting link must be carefully and accurately defined. The clearness is won at a price. There is some advantage in this elaborate method of dissecting out every distinct fibre and ramification of an argument. But, on the whole, one is apt to remember that life is limited, and that there are some things in this world which must be taken for granted. If a man's boyhood fill two volumes, and if one of these (though under unfavourable circumstances) took six months to revise, it seems probable that in later years he would have taken longer to record events than to live them. No autobiography written on such principles could ever reach even the middle life of the author. Take up, for example, the first volume of his collected works. Why, on the very first page, having occasion to mention Christendom in the fifteenth century, should he provide against some eccentric misconcept on by telling us that it did not, at that time, include any part of America? Why should it take considerably more than a page to explain that when a schoolmaster begins lessons punctually, and leaves off too late, there will be an encroachment on the hours of play? Or two pages to describe how a porter dropped a portmanteau on a flight of stairs, and didn't waken a schoolmaster? Or two more to account for the fact that he asked a woman the meaning of the noise produced

by the "bore" in the Dee, instead of waiting till she spoke to him? Impassioned prose may be a very good thing; but when its current is arrested by such incessant stoppages, and the beauty of the English language displayed by showing how many faultless sentences may be expended on an exhaustive description of irrelevant trifles, the human mind becomes recalcitrant. A man may become prolix from the fulness or fervency of his mind; but prolixity produced by this finical minuteness of language, ends by distressing one's nerves. It is the same sense of irritation as is produced by waiting for the tedious completion of an elaborate toilette, and one is rather tempted to remember Artemus Ward's description of the Fourth of July oration, which took four hours "to pass a given point."

This peculiarity of his style is connected with other qualities upon which a great deal of eulogy has been bestowed. There are two faculties in which, so far as my experience goes, no man, woman, or child ever admits his or her own deficiency. The driest of human beings will boast of their sense of humour; and the most perplexed, of their logical acuteness. De Quincey has been highly praised, both as a humourist and as a logician. He believed in his own powers, and exhibits them rather ostentatiously. He says, pleasantly enough,

but not without a substratum of real conviction, that he is "a *doctor seraphicus*, and also *inexpugnabilis* upon quillets of logic." I confess that I am generally sceptical as to the merits of infallible dialecticians, because I have observed that a man's reputation for inexorable logic is generally in proportion to the error of his conclusions. A logician, in popular estimation, seems to be one who never shrinks from a *reductio ad absurdum*. His merits are measured, not by the accuracy of his conclusions, but by the distance which separates them from his premisses. The explanation doubtless lies in the general impression that logic is concerned with words and not with things. There is a vague belief that by skilfully linking syllogisms you can form a chain sufficiently strong to cross the profoundest abyss, and which will need no test of observation and verification. A dexterous performer, it is supposed, might pass from one extremity of the universe to the other without ever touching ground; and people do not observe that the refusal to draw an inference may be just as great a proof of logical skill as ingenuity in drawing it. Now De Quincey's claim to infallibility would be plausible, if we still believed that to define words accurately is the same thing as to discover facts, and that binding them skilfully together is equivalent to reasoning securely.

He is a kind of rhetorical Euclid. He makes such a flourish with his apparatus of axioms and definitions that you do not suspect any lurking fallacy. He is careful to show you the minutest details of his argumentative mechanism. Each step in the process is elaborately and separately set forth; you are not assumed to know anything, or to be capable of supplying any links for yourself; it shall not even be taken for granted without due notice that things which are equal to a third thing are equal to each other; and the consequence is, that few people venture to question processes which seem to be so plainly set forth, and to advance by such a careful development.

When, indeed, De Quincey has a safe guide, he can put an argument with admirable clearness. The expositions of political economy, for example, are clear and ingenious, though even here I may quote Mr. Mill's remark, that he should have imagined a certain principle—obvious enough when once stated—to have been familiar to all economists, "if the instance of Mr. De Quincey did not prove that the complete non-recognition and implied denial of it are compatible with great intellectual ingenuity and close intimacy with the subject-matter."[1] Upon this question, Mr.

[1] It is curious that De Quincey, in his *Essay on Style*, explains that political economy, and especially the doctrine of

Shadworth Hodgson has maintained that De Quincey was in the right as against Mill, and I cannot here argue the point. I think, however, that all economists would admit that De Quincey's merits were confined to an admirable exposition of another man's reasoning, and included no substantial addition to the inquiry. Certainly he does not count as one of those whose writings marked any epoch in the development of the science—if it be a science. Admirable skill of expression is, indeed, no real safeguard against logical blunders; and I will venture to say that De Quincey rare y indulges in this ostentatious logical precision without plunging into downright fallacies. I will take two instances. The first is trifling, but characteristic. Poor Dr. Johnson used to reproach himself, as De Quincey puts it, "with lying too long in bed." How absurd! is the comment.

The doctor got up at eleven because he went to bed at three. If he had gone to bed at twelve, could he not easily have got up at eight? The remark would have been sound in form, though a quibble in substance, if Johnson had complained of lying in bed "too late;" but as De

value, is one of those subjects which cannot be satisfactorily treated in dialogue—the very form which he chose to adopt for that particular purpose.

Quincey himself speaks of "too long" instead of "too late," it is an obvious reply that eight hours are of the same length at every period of the day. The great logician falls into another characteristic error in the same paragraph. Dr. Johnson, he says, was not "indolent;" but he adds that Johnson "had a morbid predisposition to decline labour from his scrofulous habit of body," which was increased by over-eating and want of exercise. It is a cruel mode of vindication to say that you are not indolent, but only predisposed by a bad constitution and bad habits to decline labour; but the advantage of accurate definition is, that you can knock a man down with one hand, and pick him up with the other.

To take a more serious case. De Quincey undertakes to refute Hume's memorable argument against miracles. There are few better arenas for intellectual combats, and De Quincey has in it an unusual opportunity for display. He is obviously on his mettle. He comes forward with a whole battery of propositions, carefully marshalled in strategical order, and supported by appropriate "lemmas." One of his arguments, whether cogent or not, is that Hume's objection will not apply to the evidence of a multitude of witnesses. Now, a conspicuous miracle, he says, can be produced resting on such evidence, to wit, that of the

thousands fed by a few loaves and fishes. The simplest infidel will, of course, reply that as these thousands of witnesses cannot be produced, the evidence open to us reduces itself to that of the Evangelists. De Quincey recollects this, and replies to it in a note. "Yes," he says, "the Evangelists certainly; and, let us add, all those contemporaries to whom the Evangelists silently appealed. These make up the 'multitude' contemplated in the case" under consideration. That is, to make up the multitude, you have to reckon as witnesses all those persons who did not contradict the "silent appeal," or whose contradiction has not reached us. With such canons of criticism it is hard to say what might not be proved. When a man with a great reputation for learning and logical ability tries to put us off with these wretched quibbles, one is fairly bewildered. He shows an ignorance of the real strength and weakness of the position, which, but for his reputation, one would summarily explain by incapacity for reasoning. As it is, we must suppose that, living apart from the daily battle of life, he had lost that quick instinct possessed by all genuine logicians for recognising the vital points of an argument. A day in a court of justice would have taught him more about evidence than a month spent over Aristotle. He had become fitter for the parade of the fencing-room

than for the real thrust and parry of a duel in earnest. The mere rhetorical flourish pleases him as much as a blow at his antagonist's heart. Another glaring instance in the same paper is his apparent failure to perceive that there is a difference between proving that such a prophecy as that announcing the fall of Babylon was fulfilled, and proving that it was supernaturally inspired. Hume, without a tenth part of the logical apparatus, would have exposed the fallacy in a sentence. Paley, whom he never tires of treating to contemptuous abuse, was incapable of such feeble sophistry. De Quincey, in short, was a very able expositor; but he was not, though under better discipline he might probably have become, a sound original thinker. He is an interpreter, not an originator of thought. His skill in setting forth an argument blinds him to its most palpable defects. If language is a powerful weapon in his hands, it is only when the direction of the blow is dictated by some more manly, if less ingenious, understanding.

Let us inquire, and it is a more delicate question, whether he is better qualified to use it as a plaything. He has a reputation as a humourist. The Essay on *Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts* is probably the most popular of his writings. The conception is undoubtedly meri-

torious, and De Quincey returns to it more than once in his other works. The description of the Williams murders is inimitable, and the execution even in the humorous passages is frequently good. We may praise particular sentences: such as the well-known remark that "if a man once indulges himself in murder, he comes to think little of robbing; and from robbing he comes next to drinking and Sabbath-breaking; and from that to incivility and procrastination." One laughs at this whimsical inversion; but I don't think one laughs very heartily; and certainly one does not find, as in really deep humour, that the paradox is pregnant with further meaning, and the laugh a prelude to a more melancholy smile. Many of the best things ever said are couched in a similar form: the old remark that the use of language is the concealment of thought; the saying that the half is greater than the whole, and that two and two don't always make four, are familiar instances; but each of them really contains a profound truth expressed in a paradoxical form, which is a sufficient justification of their extraordinary popularity. But if every inversion of a commonplace were humorous, we should be able to make jokes by machinery. There is no humour that I can see in the statement that honesty is the worst policy, or that procrastination saves time;

and De Quincey's phrase, though I admit that it is amusing as a kind of summary of his essay, seems to me to rank little higher than an ingenious pun. It is a clever trick of language, but does not lead any further.

Here, too, and elsewhere, the humour gives us a certain impression of thinness. It is pressed too far, and spun out too long. Compare De Quincey's mode of beating out his one joke through pages of laboured facetiousness, with Swift's concentrated and pungent irony, as in the proposal for eating babies, or the argument to prove that the abolition of Christianity may be attended with some inconveniences. It is the difference between the stiffest of nautical grogs and the negus provided by thoughtful parents for a child's evening party. In some parts of the essay De Quincey sinks far lower. I do not believe that in any English author of reputation there is a more feeble piece of forced fun, than in the description of the fight of the amateur in murder with the baker at Munich. One knows by a process of reasoning that the man is joking; but one feels inclined to blush, through sympathy with a very clear man so exposing himself. A blemish of the same kind makes itself unpleasantly obvious at many points of his writings. He seems to fear that we shall find his stately and elaborate style rather too much for

our nerves. He is conscious that, as a great master of language, he can play what tricks he pleases, without danger of remonstrance. And therefore, he every now and then plunges into slang, not irreverently, as a vulgar writer might do, but of malice prepense. The shock is almost as great as if an organist performing a solemn tune should suddenly introduce an imitation of the mewing of a cat. Now, he seems to say, you can't accuse me of being dull and pompous. Let me quote an instance or two from his graver writings. He wishes to argue, in defence of Christianity, that the ancients were insensible to ordinary duties of humanity:

> Our wicked friend Kikero, for instance, who *was* so bad, but *wrote* so well, who *did* such naughty things, but *said* such pretty things, has himself noticed in one of his letters, with petrifying coolness, that he knew of destitute old women in Rome who went without tasting food for one, two, or even three days. After making such a statement, did Kikero not tumble downstairs and break at least three of his legs in his hurry to call a public meeting [etc., etc.].

What delicate humour! The grave apologist of Christianity actually calls Cicero, Kikero, and talks about "three of his legs!" Do we not all explode with laughter? A parallel case occurs in his argument about the Essenes; where he grows

so irrepressibly funny as to call Josephus "Mr. Joe," and addresses him as follows:

> Wicked Joseph, listen to me: you've been telling us a fairy tale; and for my part, I've no objection to a fairy tale in any situation, because if one can make no use of it oneself, always one knows that a child will be thankful for it. But this tale, Mr. Joseph, happens also to be a lie; secondly, a fraudulent lie; thirdly, a malicious lie.

I have seen this stuff described as "scholarlike badinage;" but the only effect of such exquisite foolery, within my mind, is to persuade one that a writer assailed by such weapons, and those weapons used by a man who has the whole resources of the English language at his command, must probably have been encountering an inconvenient truth. I will simply refer to the story of Sir Isaac Newton sitting all day with one stocking on and one off, in the *Casuistry of Roman Meals*, as an illustration of the way in which a story ought not to be told. Its most conspicuous, though not its worst fault, its extreme length, protects it from quotation.

It is strange to find that a writer, pre-eminently endowed with delicacy of ear, and boasting of the complex harmonies of his style, should condescend to such an irritating defect. De Quincey says of one of the greatest masters of the humorous:

> The gyration within which his (Lamb's) sentiment wheels, no matter of what kind it may be, is always the shortest possible. It does not prolong itself, it does not repeat itself, it does not propagate itself.

And he goes on to connect the failing with Lamb's utter insensibility to music, and indifference to "the rhythmical in prose composition." The criticism is a fine one in its way, but it may perhaps explain some of De Quincey's shortcomings in Lamb's peculiar sphere. De Quincey's jokes are apt to repeat and prolong and propagate themselves, till they become tiresome; and the delicate touch of the true humourist, just indicating a half-comic, half-pathetic thought, is alien to De Quincey's more elaborate style. Yet he had a true and peculiar sense of humour. That faculty may be predominant or latent; it may form the substance of a whole book, as in the case of Sterne; or it may permeate every sentence, as in Carlyle's writings; or it may simply give a faint tinge, rather perceived by subsequent analysis than consciously felt at the time; and in this lowest degree it frequently gives a certain charm to De Quincey's writing. When he tries overt acts of wit, he becomes simply vulgar; when he directly aims at the humorous, we feel his hand to be rather heavy; but he is occasionally very happy in that ironical method, of which the Essay on

*Murder* is the most notorious specimen. The best example, in my opinion, is the description of his elder brother in the *Autobiographical Sketches*. The account of the rival kingdoms of Gombroon and Tigrasylvania; of poor De Quincey's troubles in getting rid of his subjects' tails; of his despair at the suggestion that by making them sit down for six hours a day they might rub them off in the course of several centuries; of his ingenious plan of placing his unlucky island at a distance of 75 degrees of latitude from his brother's capital; and of his dismay at hearing of the "vast horns and promontories" which run down from all parts of the hostile dominions towards his unoffending little territory, are touched with admirable skill. The grave, elaborate detail of the perplexities of his childish imagination is pleasant, and at the same time pathetic. When, in short, by simply applying his usual stateliness of manner to a subject a little beneath it in dignity, he can produce the desired effect, he is eminently successful. The same rhetoric which would be appropriate (to use his favourite illustration) in treating the theme of "Belshazzar the King giving a great feast to a thousand of his lords," has a certain piquancy, when for Belshazzar we substitute a schoolboy playing at monarchy. He is indulging in a whimsical masquerade, and the pomp is

assumed in sport instead of in earnest. Nobody can do a little mock majesty so well as he who on occasion can be seriously majestic. Yet when he altogether abandons his strong ground, and chooses to tumble and make grimaces before us, like an ordinary clown, he becomes simply offensive. The great tragedian is capable on due occasion of pleasant burlesque; but sheer unadulterated comedy is beyond his powers. De Quincey, in short, can parody his own serious writing better than anybody, and the capacity is a proof that he had the faculty of humour; but for a genuine substantive joke—a joke which, resting on its own merits, instead of being the shadow of his serious writing, is to be independently humorous—he seems, to me at least, to be generally insufferable.

De Quincey's final claim to a unique position rests on the fact that his "impassioned prose" was applied to confessions. He compares himself, as I have said, to Rousseau and Augustine. The analogy with the last of these two writers would, I should imagine, be rather difficult to carry beyond the first part of resemblance; but it is possible to make out a somewhat closer affinity to Rousseau. In both cases, at least, we have to deal with men of morbid temperament, ruined or seriously injured by their utter incapacity for self-restraint. So far, however, as their confessions

derive an interest from the revelation of character, Rousseau is more exciting almost in the same proportion as he confesses greater weaknesses. The record of such errors by their chief actor, and that actor a man of such singular ability, presents us with a strangely attractive problem. De Quincey has less to confess, and is less anxious to lay bare his own morbid propensities. His story excites compassion; and, as in the famous episode of *Anne*, attracts us by the genuine tenderness and delicacy of feeling. He was free from the errors which make some of Rousseau's confessions loathsome, but he was also not the man to set fire, like Rousseau, to the hearts of a whole generation. His narrative is a delight to literary students; not a volcanic outburst to shake the foundations of society. Nearly all that he has to tell us is that he ran away from school, spent some time in London, for no very assignable reason, in a semi-starving condition, and then, equally without reason, surrendered at discretion to the respectabilities and went to Oxford like an ordinary human being. It is no doubt a proof of extraordinary literary power that the facts told with De Quincey's comment of rich meditative eloquence become so fascinating. Unfortunately, though he managed to write recollections which are, in their way, unique, he never achieved any-

thing at all comparable to his autobiographic revelations. Vague thoughts passed through his mind of composing a great work on Political Economy, or of writing a still more wonderful treatise on the Emendation of the Human Intellect. But he never seems to have made any decided steps towards the fulfilment of such dreams, and remained to the end of his days a melancholy specimen of wasted force. There is nothing, unfortunately, very uncommon in the story, except so far as its hero was a man of genius. The history of Coleridge exemplifies a still higher ambition, resulting, it is true, in a much greater influence upon the thought of the age, but almost equally sad. Their lives might be put into tracts for the use of opium-eaters; and whilst there was still hope of redeeming them, it might have been worth while to condemn them with severity. Indignation is now out of place, and we can only grieve and pass by. When thousands of men are drinking themselves to death every year, there is nothing very strange or dramatic in the history of one ruined by opium instead of by gin.

From De Quincey's writings we get the notion of a man amiable, but with an uncertain temper; with fine emotions, but an utter want of moral strength; and, in short, of a nature of much delicacy and tenderness retreating into opium

and the Lake district, from a world which was too rough for him. He uttered in many fragmentary ways his views of philosophy and politics. Whatever their value, De Quincey has of course no claim to be an originator. He not only had not strength to stand alone, but he belonged to a peculiar side-current of English thought. He was the adjective of which Coleridge was the substantive; and if Coleridge himself was an unsatisfactory and imperfect thinker, his imperfections are greatly increased in his friend and disciple. He shared that belief which some people have not yet abandoned, that the answer to all our perplexities is to be found in some of the mysteries of German metaphysics. If we could only be taught to distinguish between the reason and the understanding, the scales would fall from our eyes, and we should see that the Thirty-nine Articles contained the plan on which the universe was framed. He had an acquaintance, which, if his own opinion were correct, was accurate and profound, with Kant's writings, and had studied Schelling, Fichte, and Hegel. He could talk about concepts and categories and schematisms without losing his head amongst those metaphysical heights. He knew how by the theoretic reason to destroy all proofs of the existence of God, and then, by introducing the practical reason, to set the existence of God

beyond a doubt. He fancied that he was able to translate the technicalities of Kant into plain English; and he believed that when so translated, they would prove to have a real and all-important meaning. If German metaphysics be a science, and not a mere edifice of moonshine; and if De Quincey had really penetrated the secrets of that science, we have missed a chance of enlightenment. As it is, we have little left except a collection of contemptuous prejudices. De Quincey thought himself entitled to treat Locke as a shallow pretender. The whole eighteenth century was, with one or two exceptions, a barren wilderness to him. He aspersed its reasoners, from Locke to Paley; he scorned its poets with all the bitterness of the school which first broke loose from the rule of Pope; and its prose-writers, with the exception of Burke, were miserable beings in his eyes. He would have seen with little regret a holocaust of all the literature produced in England between the death of Milton and the rise of Wordsworth. Naturally, he hated an infidel with that kind of petulant bitterness which possesses an old lady in a country village, who has just heard that some wicked people dispute the story of Balaam's ass. And, as a corollary, he combined the whole French people in one sweeping censure, and utterly despised their morals, manners, literature, and

political principles. He was a John Bull, as far as a man can be who is of weakly, nervous temperament, and believes in Kant.

One or two illustrations may be given of the force of these effeminate prejudices; and it is to be remarked with regret that they are specially injurious in a department where he otherwise had eminent merits, that, namely, of literary criticism. Any man who lived in the eighteenth century was *primâ facie* a fool; if a free thinker, his case was all but hopeless; but if a French free thinker, it was desperate indeed. He lets us into the secret of his prejudices, which, indeed, is tolerably transparent in his statement that he found it hard to reverence Coleridge when he supposed him to be a Socinian. Now, though a "liberal man," he could not hold a Socinian to be a Christian; nor could he "think that any man, though he make himself a marvellously clever disputant, ever could tower upwards into a very great philosopher, unless he should begin or end with Christianity." The canon may be sound, but it at once destroys the pretensions of such men as Hobbes, Spinoza, Hume, and even, though De Quincey considers him "a dubious exception," Kant. Even heterodoxy is enough to alienate his sympathies.

Think of a man [he exclaims about poor Whiston], who had brilliant preferment within his reach, drag-

ging his poor wife and daughter for half a century through the very mire of despondency and destitution, because he disapproved of Athanasius, or because the "Shepherd of Hermas" was not sufficiently esteemed by the Church of England.

To do him justice, De Quincey admits, in another passage, that this ridicule of a poor man for sacrificing his interests to his principles was not quite fair; but then Whiston was only an Arian. When Priestley, who was a far worse heretic, had his house sacked by a mob and his life endangered, De Quincey can scarcely restrain his exultation. He admits in terms that Priestley ought to be pitied, but adds that the fanaticism of the mob was "much more reasonable" than the fanaticism of Priestley; and that those who play at bowls must look out for rubbers. Porson is to be detested for his letters to Travis, though De Quincey does not dare to defend the disputed text. He has, however, a pleasant insinuation at command. Porson, he says, stung like a hornet; "it may chance that on this subject Master Porson will get stung through his coffin, before he is many years deader." What scholarlike badinage! Political heretics fare little better. Fox's eloquence was "ditch-water," with a shrill effervescence of "imaginary gas." Burnet was a "gossiper, slanderer, and notorious falsifier of facts." That one of his

sermons was burnt is "the most consolatory fact in his whole worldly career;" and he asks, "Would there have been much harm in tying his lordship to the sermon?" Junius was not only a knave who ought to have been transported, but his literary success rested upon an utter delusion. He had neither "sentiment, imagination, nor generalisation." Johnson, though the best of Tories, lived in the wrong century, and unluckily criticised Milton with foolish harshness. Therefore "Johnson, viewed in relation to Milton, was a malicious, mendacious, and dishonest man."

Let us turn to greater names. Goethe's best work was *Werther*, and De Quincey is convinced that his reputation "must decline for the next generation or two, until it reaches its just level." His merits have been exaggerated for three reasons —first, his great age; secondly, "the splendour of his official rank at the court of Weimar;" thirdly, "his enigmatical and unintelligible writing." But "in Germany his works are little read, and in this country not at all." *Wilhelm Meister* is morally detestable, and, artistically speaking, rubbish. Of the author of the *Philosophical Dictionary*, of the *Essai sur les Mœurs*, of *Candide*, and certain other trifles, his judgment is that Horace Walpole's reputation is the same in kind as the *genuine* reputation of Voltaire: "Both are very splendid memoir

writers, and of the two, Lord Orford is the more brilliant." In the same tone he compares Gibbon to Southey, giving the advantage to the latter on the score of his poetical ability; and his view of another great infidel may be inferred from the following phrase. One of Rousseau's opinions is only known to us through Cowper, "for in the unventilated pages of its originator it would have lurked undisturbed down to this hour of June, 1819."

Voltaire and Rousseau have the double title to hatred of being Frenchmen and free thinkers. But even orthodox Frenchmen fare little better. "The French Bossuets, Bourdaloues, Fénelons, etc., whatever may be thought of their meagre and attenuated rhetoric, are one and all the most commonplace of thinkers." In fact, the mere mention of France acts upon him like a red rag on a bull. The French, "in whom the lower forms of passion are constantly bubbling up, from the shallow and superficial character of their feelings," are incapable of English earnestness. Their taste is "anything but good in all that department of wit and humour"—the department, apparently, of anecdotes—"and the ground lies in their natural want of veracity;" whereas England bases upon its truthfulness a well-founded claim to "a moral pre-eminence among the nations." Belgians, French, and Italians attract the inconsiderate by

"facile obsequiousness," which, however, is a pendent of "impudence and insincerity. Want of principle and want of moral sensibility compose the original *fundus* of southern manners." Our faults of style, such as they are, proceed from our manliness. In France there are no unmarried women at the age which amongst us gives the insulting name of old maid. "What striking sacrifices of sexual honour does this one fact argue!" The French style is remarkable for simplicity—"a strange pretension for anything French" but on the whole the intellectual merits of their style are small, "chiefly negative," and "founded on the accident of their colloquial necessities." They are amply compensated, too, by "the prodigious defects of the French in all the higher qualities of prose composition." Even their handwriting is the "very vilest form of scribbling which exists in Europe," and they and the Germans are "the two most gormandising races in Europe." They display a brutal selfishness in satisfying their appetites, whereas Englishmen at all public meals are remarkably conspicuous for "a spirit of mutual attention and self-sacrifice." It is enough to show the real degradation of their habits, that they use the "odious gesture" of shrugging their shoulders, and are fond of the "vile ejaculation 'bah!'" which is as bad as to puff the smoke of a tobacco-

pipe into your companion's face. They have neither self-respect nor respect for others. French masters are never dignified, though sometimes tyrannical; French servants are always, even without meaning it, disrespectfully familiar. Many of their manners and usages are "essentially vulgar, and their apparent affability depends not on kindness of heart, but love of talking."

The impudence of the assertions is really amusing, though one cannot but regret that the vulgar prejudice of the old-fashioned John Bull should have been embodied in the pages of a master of our language. They are worth notice because they were not special to De Quincey, but characteristic of one very intelligible tendency of his generation. De Quincey's prejudices are chiefly the reflection of those of the Coleridge school in general, though he added to them a few pet aversions of his own. At times his genuine acuteness of mind raises him above the teaching of his masters, or at least enables him to detect their weaknesses. He discovers Coleridge's plagiarisms, though he believes and, indeed, speaks in the most exaggerated terms of his philosophical pretensions; whilst, in treating of Wordsworth, he points out with great skill the fallacy of some of his theories and the inconsistency of his practice. But whilst keenly observant of some of the failings of his

friends, he reproduces others in even an exaggerated type. He shows to the full their narrow-minded hatred of the preceding century, of all forms of excellence which did not correspond to their favourite types, and of all speculation which did not lead to, or start from, their characteristic doctrines. The error is fully pardonable. We must not look to men who are leading a revolt against established modes of thought for a full appreciation of the doctrines of their antagonists; and if De Quincey could recognise no merit in Voltaire or Rousseau, in Locke, Paley, or Jeremy Bentham, their followers were quite prepared to retaliate in kind. One feels, however, that such prejudices are more respectable when they are the foibles of a strong mind engaged in active warfare. We can pardon the old campaigner, who has become bitter in an internecine contest. It is not quite so pleasant to discover the same bitterness in a gentleman who has looked on from a distance, and never quite made up his mind to buckle on his armour. De Quincey had not earned the right of speaking evil of his enemies. If a man chances to be a Hedonist, he should show the good temper which is the best virtue of the indolent. To lie on a bed of roses, and snarl at everybody who contradicts your theories, seems to imply rather testiness of temper than strength of conviction.

De Quincey is a Christian on Epicurean principles. He dislikes an infidel because his repose is disturbed by the arguments of free thinkers. He fears that he will be forced to think conscientiously, and to polish his logical weapons afresh. He mutters that the man is a fool, and could be easily thrashed if it were worth while, and then turns back to his opium and his rhetoric and his beloved Church of England. There is no pleasanter institution for a gentleman who likes magnificent historical associations, and heartily hates the rude revolutionists who would turn the world upside down, and thereby disturb the rest of dreamy metaphysicians.

He is quite pathetic, too, about the British Constitution. "Destroy the House of Lords," he exclaims, "and henceforward, for people like you and me, England will be no habitable land." Here, he seems to say, is one charming elysium, where no rude hand has swept away the cobwebs or replaced the good old-fashioned machinery; here we may find rest in the "pure, holy, and magnificent Church," whose Articles, interpreted by Coleridge, may guide us through the most wondrous of metaphysical labyrinths, and dwell in a grand constitutional edifice, rich in picturesque memories, and blending into one complex harmony elements contributed by a long series of centuries.

And you, wretched French revolutionists, with your love of petty precision, and irreverent radicals and utilitarians, with your grovelling material notions, propose to level, and destroy, and break in upon my delicious reveries. No old Hebrew prophet could be more indignant with the enemy who threatened to break down the carved work of his temples with axes and hammers. But his complaint is, after all, the voice of the sluggard. Let me dream a little longer; for much as I love my country and its institutions, I cannot rouse myself to fight for them. It is enough if I call their assailants an ugly name or so, and at times begin to write what might be the opening pages of the preface to some very great work of the future. Alas! the first digression diverts the thread of the discourse; the task becomes troublesome, and the labour is abruptly broken off. And so in a life of seventy-three years De Quincey read extensively and thought acutely by fits, ate an enormous quantity of opium, wrote a few pages which revealed new capacities in the language, and provided a good deal of respectable padding for magazines. It sounds, and many people will say that it is, a harsh and, perhaps they will add, a stupid judgment. If so, they may find plenty of admirers who will supply the eulogistic side here too briefly indicated. I will only say two things:

first, that there are very few writers who have revealed new capacities in the language, and in English literature they might almost be counted on the fingers. Secondly, I must confess that I have often consulted De Quincey in regard to biographic and critical questions, and that though I have generally found something to admire, I have always found gross inaccuracies and almost always effeminate prejudices and mere flippancies draped in elaborate rhetoric. I take leave, therefore, to insist upon faults which are passed over too easily by writers of more geniality than I claim to possess.

END OF VOLUME I.